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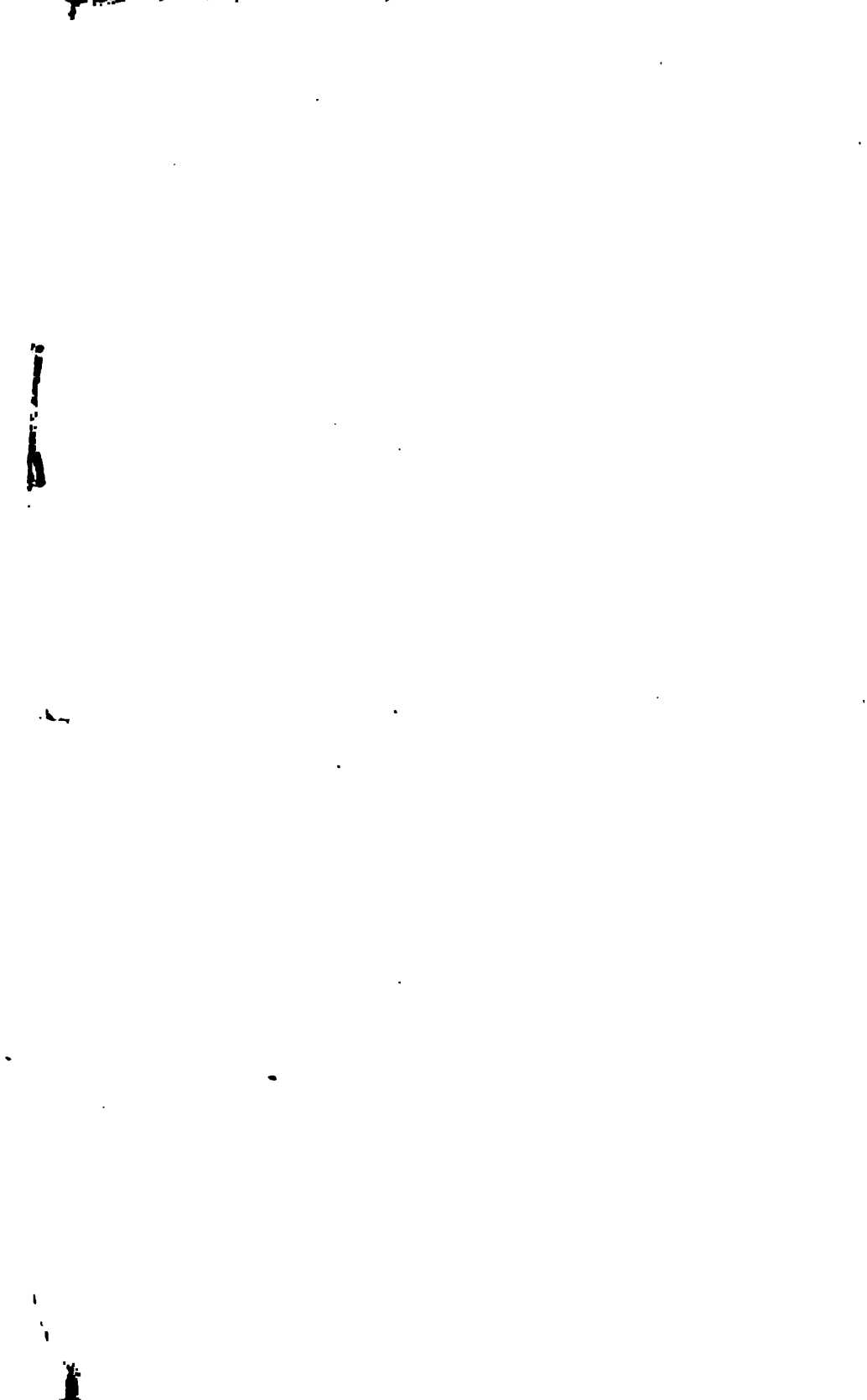




Mrs. M. H. H. H.

Nov. 1877







# THE HEIR EXPECTANT.

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4472

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"RAYMOND'S HEROINE," "KATHLEEN," &c.

*Harwood, Isabella*  
=



NEW YORK:

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# PROLOGUE.—THE BARGAIN.

## CHAPTER I.

### LARES AND PENATES.

"**HURRAH!** I've got it. You dear, darling Agnes, what do you think of that? Yes, I've got it—really and truly got it, and all in fair fight, so here goes!"

With these words a school-boy's cap was flung high into the air, and then, being dexterously recaught, was made to whirl in frantic gyrations round the head of its owner. This was a tall, comely youth, who might have been styled boy or young man, according to the age of the person called upon to make the definition—that is to say, he was somewhere between sixteen and seventeen years old. He had just come bursting into a room where a woman about ten years his senior sat nursing a baby at the fireside, while two other very young children played near her—a homely interior enough, but made cosy-looking by bright candle-light, red stuff curtains closely drawn, and a well-spread tea-table. The time was a winter evening in the year 184—.

The woman looked up with a face which, though it lacked the youthful freshness of the boy's, was not unlike his in its general shape and dark yet clear complexion.

"What, Harry? The scholarship?"

"Yes, got it as sure as my name is Harold Maxwell, and all the masters as pleased and complimentary—pon my word, I think they laid the batter on almost too thick. If you had only been there; but of course you couldn't because of baby. So I'm to go to Oxford next term—was there ever any thing half so jolly?"

"My dear, dear Harry! I am so glad—so proud— But I always knew my brother would make me proud of him."

The boy shook back the hair joyously from his temples.

"Well, well, I don't know about proud; but you shall never be ashamed of me, that's one thing certain. Nor you either, young shaver," he went on, coming forward to pinch the baby's cheek, who acknowledged the attention by kicking and crowing uproariously. "What a little Turk it is! and knows that I'm his uncle as well—ah! as well as the other rogues there."

With this the young uncle got on his knees to kiss and hug the other two children, who came pressing about him, stroking him and poking him and fighting him with such gusto as showed that he was a familiar and favorite play-fellow.

"Ah! you monkeys, is that the way you serve me? Why, how strong Aggy is growing! She'll be more than a match for me soon, and as for Ansty, he's a perfect prize-fighter. Look, I've

not forgotten you, here's some toffee to eat my health with; you must learn to be as glad of the good news as I am. But seriously," and here the lad sprang once more to his feet, and approached his sister with glowing cheeks, "isn't it glorious good news? Ah! you dear Agnes, I knew how pleased you would be. And how pleased Austin will be too, won't he? He has not come in yet, I suppose?"

"Not yet. I expect him every minute. Yes, indeed he will be delighted, I can answer for him, and as proud of you as I am."

"Well, he may be proud of himself if he likes, for it was all his doing. Ah! Agnes, I haven't said any thing about it yet, but you need not think I have forgotten it. He's the primest fellow breathing, and I hope I shall live to pay him back something of what he has done for me, that's all. What, Austy, at it again, are you?"

In another moment he was once more on his knees, giving himself up to a game of romps with the children, while their mother looked on with radiant eyes which showed how happy the youth's tidings had made her. And here, leaving the brother and sister thus occupied, it may be well to say a few words of their antecedents and present circumstances.

They were the only children of a country surgeon who had once been very successful in his profession, but who had died some years since considerably straitened in his means, leaving behind him barely enough to keep his son and daughter out of actual want, to say nothing of securing a suitable education for the boy, then little more than a child. Fortunately, however, the daughter had just before her father's death accepted an offer of marriage from one Austin Waters—a handsome young fellow who, perhaps by reason of his handsomeness, had succeeded in finding the way to her heart. At the time of the engagement he had been considered by her friends as rather beneath her in station, being only a clerk in a Liverpool merchant's office; but now, measured by the standard of her altered prospects, his salary seemed to promise her a position of comparative affluence. Her own future was thus safe, but she was not satisfied until she had provided for that of her young brother also, by stipulating that he should be an inmate of her new home—a condition easily assented to by Waters, who was both an ardent lover and a good-natured fellow to boot. The arrangement then made had continued in force ever since, working to the entire satisfaction of all parties concerned, so that the head of the household had never been heard to complain of the burdens which it had laid on him.



These had indeed been very slight at first, the trifle which young Harold inherited from his father nearly or quite sufficing for his maintenance and early education; but within the last two or three years they had materially increased in consequence of his strongly developed taste for study, and his sister's anxiety that it should not be thwarted. Thus, at an age when other lads in his position are put to earn their own livelihood, he was still a diligent learner in a grammar-school near Liverpool, even aspiring so high as to compete for a scholarship offered as a prize for distinguished merit. Of course, in his circumstances, he would not have been able to devote himself to study with so much industry and success but for some little pecuniary assistance from his brother-in-law, towards whom, as has been seen, he did not fail to declare himself grateful.

The game of romps was still proceeding with unabated vigor, when the sound of a key being fitted into the lock of the street-door made the young student look round with an expression of pleased expectation. There was a heavy step in the passage, and then, the door of the little parlor being rather boisterously and gustily flung open, the master of the house made his appearance.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, well-made man, still young—he was scarcely thirty—and still young-looking, with a fresh-colored complexion, and handsome if not very strongly individualized features, set off with abundant dark brown hair and whiskers. His voice was generally loud and sonorous, though with an occasional tendency to raise its inflections at the end of a sentence, which was apt to impair its mellowness, and to suggest to an observer of character either some latent irresoluteness of purpose or possible querulousness of temper. It has been said that his voice was loud, and it may be added that not only his voice, but his whole manner, was sometimes, as on the present occasion, a little too much inclined to noisiness to be quite that of a gentleman; but then his noisiness was so manifestly an expression of the greater or less degree of joyousness which might be within him that nobody could have had the heart to find fault with it.

"Well, here I am!" he exclaimed on entering, rubbing his hands cheerily the while. "Hallo, Austy, hallo, Aggy, and how are you getting along? Hands off, younkers, or you'll pull me to pieces between you. But my stars! if here isn't Uncle Harry back from the examination. Well, my lad, what news? Out with it."

"He has succeeded, Austin," put in Mrs. Waters triumphantly. "He is going to Oxford next term."

"Going to Oxford, is he!" echoed her husband, bringing his broad palms together with a smack that made the tea-things ring. "Well done, Harry; but I always said he would be the big man of the family. Going to Oxford! Shake hands on it, my boy, and here's long life and good luck to you!"

So saying, he seized the youth's hand in both his, and shook it with might and main.

"I'm sure, Austin, I never can say how much obliged I am to you," said the boy, blushing up to his eyes at the exuberance of his brother-in-law's congratulations. "Not only for your kindness just now, you know, but all along. It was all through you I was ever able to do it, I have not forgotten that."

"Pooh, pooh! not a word, my dear fellow, not a word. It's we who have got to thank you for being such a big man, and giving us somebody to be proud of. Why, you'll be a judge or a bishop some day, or member of Parliament at the very least; and then shan't we boast of you, and won't little Harry stand six inches higher in his shoes to think that he has got such a god-father? Eh! baby, eh! won't you? Bless me, how that child does grow! And now, Agnes, perhaps you won't mind putting him down and giving me a bit of something, for I'm as hungry as a wolf. Come along, let's sit down and be jolly, and Harry will tell us all about the examination. Now, children, be a little quiet, if you can."

The baby was laid down, and the rest of the family being settled round the tea-table, Mr. Waters applied himself to the business of the meal with as much diligence as was compatible with attention to the claims of a hungry little mouth on each side, and a desire to lose nothing of what his brother-in-law was saying about the examination. It was some time before the confusion abated, but at last, the children having been plied with bread and jam to their hearts' content, and Harold having finished his account of the day's proceedings amid fresh congratulations, there came a momentary lull, during which the master of the house sat silently stirring his tea, with a contemplative air not usual with him. Presently he looked round the table, and, still stirring his tea thoughtfully, began: "By-the-way, I have news to-day too. Uncle Gilbert is in Liverpool just now."

"Your uncle Gilbert here!" said Mrs. Waters in manifest surprise. "No, surely!"

"Yes, but he is though; they were talking about him at the office to-day—old Waters, the Bristol banker, they called him—little thinking, of course, that I was his own full nephew. Yea, he is really in Liverpool—looking up some debts, they say. And do you know, he is actually going to give up business!"

"Give up business! I should have thought he was a great deal too fond of making money for that."

"Yes, but there's one thing he is still fonder of, and that is, of keeping it when he has made it, and I dare say he gets more afraid of the risks of business as he grows older. And perhaps (though I suppose that's hardly possible), perhaps he thinks he has made enough by this time. They say he is worth a hundred and fifty thousand—what do you think of that? A hundred and fifty thousand!"

"It seems a great deal, certainly," acquiesced Mrs. Waters in rather awe-struck tones.

"A great deal—I should think it was," said her husband, stirring his tea again, a little more vigorously this time. "A strange thing, eh, that I should be the only relation he has in the world, and pottering on at two hundred a year, while he is counting his money by the hundred thousand. And here he is in the same town, and I suppose wouldn't so much as say how d'y'e do if he was to see me."

And as Austin Waters spoke thus, the tendency of his voice to an upward inflection made itself more audible than it had yet done this evening.

"Never mind, dear Austin," said Mrs. Waters soothingly. "It is very sad to be on bad terms

with a relation, of course, and it was cruel to quarrel with you just because you were generous enough to marry a wife without money; still I have often thought that very likely you would have been no better off if he had continued friendly with you. Every body says he is such a dreadful miser, you know—"

"Oh yes! miser enough, that's certain. But don't you go and think that I am complaining, Agnes—of course I know it can't be helped. No, no, all I mean to say is that it is very queer to think of my being so poor with a rich old fellow like that for an uncle, and you can't deny that it is; uncommon queer, and rather trying, too, perhaps. It isn't such a pleasant thing to be poor that one need pretend to like it."

"Well now, I'm not so sure of that," put in Harold with boyish decision. "You may laugh, Austin, and I dare say you will, but for my part I always think a fellow ought to be better pleased with being poor at first, because then, do you see, you've got to make up the score with your own strokes, and that is ever so much jollier than taking odds. And you may say that rich chaps—chaps that begin by being rich, I mean—have odds given them whether they like it or not, and 'pon my word I have often thought it very hard on them, I have indeed. There, you think me precious green, don't you, but that's my way of looking at things, and I'm sure you'd find it a very comfortable way if you'd only take it."

"Ah! it's well enough for you to talk so now," said Mr. Waters, balancing his spoon on the edge of his tea-cup with a slightly discontented air, "but only wait till you are my age, and you'll find that money is a better thing than you think. Not that I expect ever to see much of it, goodness knows. Some people in this world are cut out for luck, and some aren't."

With this the speaker sighed, and the spoon fell into his cup.

"Come, come, Austin, how do you know that?" said the boy. "I'll tell you what—don't you trouble your head about it, and perhaps some day the old fellow's money may come tumbling in to you just when you least expect it."

"Ah! it's all very fine, but I know Uncle Gilbert better than you do, and I know that when he once takes a thing into his head he sticks to it like wax. Why, if he had ever intended to be friends, wouldn't he have taken some notice of that letter I was fool enough to write him on his birthday?—and that's more than three months ago now, you see. No, no, not a penny of his money will ever come my way, so I may as well make up my mind to do without it."

"Well, better do without it than be hanging about for it all your life," said Harold stoutly. "A fellow who does nothing but look to see which way other fellows send their balls can't do much good with his own, you know. Don't you be in the blues, Austin, I'll back you to turn up trumps without Uncle Gilbert to help you."

"I'm not in the blues, as you call it, I only say that money is money, and that it's a hard thing to see one's nearest relations wallowing in wealth while one is as poor as a church mouse one's self. And so it is hard—confounded hard."

"I am very sorry, Austin," murmured Mrs. Waters's gentle deprecating voice from the other end of the table—"very sorry indeed, and all the sorrier, of course, to think that it happened on

my account. Though still it was not my fault that he chose to be so unkind, and I am sure you know, dear, that so far as I can repay you by trying to make you happy—"

"Happy, you darling!" interrupted her husband, the implied appeal to his magnanimity restoring him to his pristine good-humor as if by magic. "Happy"—and he emphasized the word by jumping up and rapping the table—"I'm the happiest dog alive, and if you think for one moment that I regret—What! haven't I got you, and haven't I got the children, and haven't I got Harry, and isn't it a pride and a pleasure to do what I can for you all? Not that I don't like my work for its own sake, mind you; it would be strange if I didn't at the rate I'm getting on. If you had only been in the office to hear the way old Smith was talking to-day! I shouldn't wonder a bit if he raises me another fifty before I'm a month older, and wouldn't that be glorious—two hundred and fifty a year! Happy—I should think I was happy. Give us a kiss, Agnes, and never talk such nonsense again. And you, Harry, shake hands; you were right, and I was wrong; the money is all my eye, filthy lucre, eh? And now we'll have another cup, and mother shall give Austy and Aggy some more jam, and we'll all be jolly together."

He returned to his place between the two children with a beaming face in which were reflected the loving looks cast at him by his wife from the other end of the table, while Austy and Aggy, ogling Uncle Harry with all their might, drummed loudly on their plates in token of satisfaction, and even the baby sent forth from his cradle at the fireside a sympathetic coo of approval. Never, surely, was there a happier family group, and that evening would probably have been for all present one of the pleasantest they had ever known, but for an interruption which came just as the enjoyment thus reached its height.

Somebody knocked smartly at the street-door.

"Hallo! what's that?" said the head of the family, stopping in the act of conveying a spoonful of jam to one of the little plates on each side of him. "A visitor at this time of day! Shall I go and see who it is?"

"It must be some mistake, surely," said Mrs. Waters, looking a little annoyed. "No, you needn't trouble yourself—there is Susan going."

The bustling footstep of a small maid-of-all-work was heard pattering along the passage, and, the street-door having been opened, another footstep—a slow creaking one this time—was heard advancing towards the parlor.

"Oh! sir," said the little maid-servant, putting in her head, "here's a gentleman who—"

But before she had time to complete the sentence, a figure appeared behind hers, at sight of which Austin Waters gave a great start of recognition, while, transfixed to his chair in sheer astonishment, he exclaimed tremulously:

"Uncle Gilbert!"

## CHAPTER II.

### UNCLE GILBERT.

For some seconds a solemn silence rested on all that little group, the eyes of every one being turned as by a kind of fascination towards the

doorway. And yet the figure which stood there scarcely seemed calculated to command any extraordinary tribute of respect or deference, being simply that of a wiry withered little old man of sixty-five or so, attired in a tight-fitting suit of rather rusty black, with scanty iron-gray hair and whiskers, and sunken gray eyes surrounded by innumerable crows'-feet. But insignificant as Uncle Gilbert looked, he was known to be worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and the mysterious hush that greeted his entrance was an act of homage which all present unconsciously combined to render to Mammon as embodied in his person.

He remained standing for some time on the threshold, surveying those in the room with a grim smile, in apparent enjoyment of the effect produced by his presence; then, coming a step forward, he began, still with the same grim smile:

"Well, Nephew Austin, so you know me again, I see."

His voice was naturally harsh and grating, and, whether for this reason or simply because it was that of a stranger, the baby most unfortunately took the opportunity of setting up a lamentable howl.

Uncle Gilbert frowned.

"I can't stand this, you know. I'm ready to go away without troubling you further, but I can't stay in the same room with such a row as that. Can't you put a stop to it, somebody?"

The last words were spoken to the little maid-servant, who, infected by the general awe, had fallen back into the passage, where she stood regarding the new-comer in mute consternation, and uncertain whether her further services were required. As she found herself thus invoked, she looked timidly towards her master for instructions.

"Yes, yes, take him away," was the impatient answer. "I am very sorry you should be so annoyed, uncle, but—"

"Never mind, so long as there's no more of it. Perhaps if the young woman could make it convenient to clear the other couple off at the same time—I'm uncommon fond of children, you see, only I like their room better than their company, he! he!"

"Get away, children, get away," said the father, lifting first one child and then the other off its chair in a great hurry. "There, be quiet, and get along with Susan—there."

He pushed them all out very unceremoniously, and then, having shut the door upon them, approached his uncle penitently.

"I'm sure, uncle, I'm very sorry—"

"That will do. And now that we are a little quiet again, perhaps you had better introduce me to your wife. This is the lady, I suppose? How do you do, ma'am? Well, as my nephew had the grace to write me a civil letter some months ago, you see I have come to look at you at last—on the principle of making the best of a bad job, you know, ma'am."

Poor Mrs. Waters colored, and forced a faint smile by way of answer. There was a short pause, nobody in the room finding any thing to say in reply to a speech which all felt to be very rude. One person indeed appeared as though he would have liked to say something, and that was young Harold, who looked up with a quick flush

of indignation as his sister was thus addressed. But if he had any idea of speaking he restrained himself, and merely turned his eyes with something of an expectant expression towards Austin Waters.

Austin Waters, however, only said:

"Won't you take a seat, uncle?"

The old man let himself slowly drop into a chair, glancing round him as he did so in swift yet searching observation of the room and its occupants. Perhaps there was something in Harold's look which he noticed and understood, for presently his keen gray eyes fastened themselves on the youth with some severity, while he asked his nephew:

"And pray who is this young gentleman, if I may make so bold?"

"Only Harold Maxwell—my wife's brother, you know, uncle, who lives with us," explained Austin with great urbanity.

"Oh indeed! your wife's brother who lives with you. Yes, I think I have heard of that arrangement—a very pleasant one for the young gentleman, no doubt, and remarkably economical."

The lad's face became scarlet, but still he said nothing, this time not even raising his eyes. Mrs. Waters grew very red too, and looked towards her husband. He was evidently a good deal discomposed, and shuffled uneasily in his chair as though not knowing very well what to say. After a while he spoke.

"It was very kind of you to come to see us this evening, I'm sure."

"Well, I happened to be in Liverpool, and I thought I wouldn't leave without seeing you. A cup of tea, Mrs. Waters, if you please."

Mrs. Waters rose, and nervously set about making fresh tea. The old man watched her for a moment, and then resumed, lightly switching a few grains of dust from his knee with a pair of black gloves which he invariably carried when he went out, but as invariably abstained from putting on:

"However, it wasn't only to see you that I took the trouble of turning out this cold evening. The fact is, I have an arrangement to propose."

"I am sure we ought to feel very much gratified, sir," said the nephew politely.

"I think you ought, young man. Well, and now I suppose you want to know what it is. In the first place, then, I have got to tell you that I am retiring from business."

"Yes, uncle. I heard them say something about that in our office this morning."

"Did you indeed? Well, if you hear them again, you may tell them they would do better to mind their own affairs. Yes, I am retiring from business. Money is not so easily made that you need wish to run the chance of losing it again when you have spent your whole life in scraping a little together. So, as there will be nothing to tie me any longer to Bristol, I am thinking of going to live in the country on a little property I have at Chorcombe."

This Chorcombe was a small town in Somersetshire—so small that it will be vain to look for it in an ordinary map—where, as Austin Waters knew, his uncle was possessed of considerable property, which had some years ago fallen into his hands by the foreclosure of a mortgage.

"Oh! indeed, uncle," assented Austin dutifully.

"Yes, I have a large house there—one of the best in the place—that has been standing empty eleven quarters; so, as it doesn't seem likely to let, I suppose I may as well occupy it myself. I must live somewhere, you know."

He shook his head gently as though this were a necessity which he rather deplored than otherwise; then slowly went on, stirring the tea which Mrs. Waters had just handed him:

"And I have been thinking, Austin, that, living like that in the country among a lot of strangers who you may be sure will be doing their best to cheat and impose upon me (I know what human nature is), I have been thinking that it would be a good thing at my time of life to have somebody near me that I could depend upon to stand my friend and take care of my interests. I'm not so young as I was (and I don't mind telling you, Austin, I've put by a trifle of money that needs a good deal of seeing after), and if I was ever laid up for a few days it is dreadful to think of what might happen with such a set of harpies looking on. So I was going to say that supposing you choose to give up every thing here, you may come and live at Chorcombe if you like, and in that case I wouldn't mind promising that the bit of money I may have to leave behind shall go to you when I die."

The eyes of the young man glistened; he had never been accustomed to deal with large sums, and the idea of becoming the ultimate possessor of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds was positively bewildering.

"Yes, I have made up my mind," said Uncle Gilbert, casting a sharp glance upward to note the effect of his words. "You are the only relation left me in the world, and I think the money would have more chance of being taken care of in your hands, than if I was to leave it to a lot of dandy clerks and secretaries to build a hospital with, eh?"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Austin gratefully.

"You quite understand, though, what I should expect on your part. You are to come and live at Chorcombe, not in my house, of course—Heaven forbid, with all those squalling babies—but I'll look out one of my little cottages for you that I'll let you have rent-free; there, what do you think of that? And then you will have to live like a gentleman, mind you, as my nephew ought to live, for I shall be the great man of the place naturally, and I can't afford to be disgraced by my relations. If you want work I shall find you odd jobs to do for me that will keep your hand in, but you are never to put pen to paper for any body else, remember. I'm not going to have my nephew hiring himself out by the day, or by the week or the year, either. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Austin with much humility. "But—but—"

"What is it?" asked the old man sharply.

"What am I to do about a salary, sir? I have nothing of my own, you know, and if you would please to consider—"

"I have considered every thing," rejoined the other promptly, "and I have decided to allow you the yearly sum of a hundred pounds. One hundred pounds," he repeated emphatically, "and next to nothing to do for it."

Austin's countenance fell; it was evident that he regarded the hundred pounds from a point of view quite other than his uncle's.

"A hundred pounds a year with a wife and three children to support!" he exclaimed blankly.

"Certainly—a hundred pounds a year. Bless me, what would people nowadays have? Young hearty folks like you, and a pack of children—what sort of cockering up do you want that you turn up your noses at a hundred a year? Why, suppose I tell you what my weekly expenses are, and have been for the last twenty years—and mind, in my position I've been obliged to keep up a kind of style. Just seventeen and eightpence halfpenny on the average of the whole year for every thing but house-rent, and I've wanted for nothing, look you—not a Sunday out of all the fifty-two that I don't have my hot joint and clean shirt in honor of my Saviour, and I should like to know who need do better than that."

He looked round with an air of stern defiance; then, finding that no one ventured to differ from him, descended from dogma to argument.

"And you'll bear in mind that Chorcombe comes cheaper than Bristol by a great deal—beef twopence-halfpenny a pound less, and mutton twopence, and I know I'm right, for I made particular inquiries. Why, a hundred a year in a place like that is a fortune—a perfect fortune. And then look at what you will have to do for it—next to nothing, less than nothing, I may almost say. And I'm getting an old man now, Austin—quite an old man. Ah! I don't suppose you'll have long to wait for my little bit of money."

With this he coughed a hollow-sounding cough, either as a tribute of sympathy to his own infirmities, or by way of enforcing his last argument, for he had not hitherto seemed to be suffering from any particular ailment.

Austin Waters was plainly in great perplexity. For a while he sat meditating with downcast eyes, then, as though desirous of other counsel than his own, he raised his head and glanced inquiringly towards his wife. But his look went unanswered, for she was gazing thoughtfully before her, with her downward-turned face slightly averted, so that he could see nothing of it save that it was very pale.

"Well, is it to be yes or no?" asked the visitor presently.

The nephew started, and was apparently about to speak, when all at once he heard an eager voice at his ear whisper:

"Say no—do say no."

The voice was that of Harold Maxwell, who had been watching the workings of his brother-in-law's countenance with intense anxiety—anxiety that reached its culminating point in the words which had now half involuntarily burst from his lips.

But the words had been heard by others than Austin Waters, for whom alone they had been intended, if indeed they were intended to be heard at all.

The old man turned round briskly.

"Eh? Who said that?"

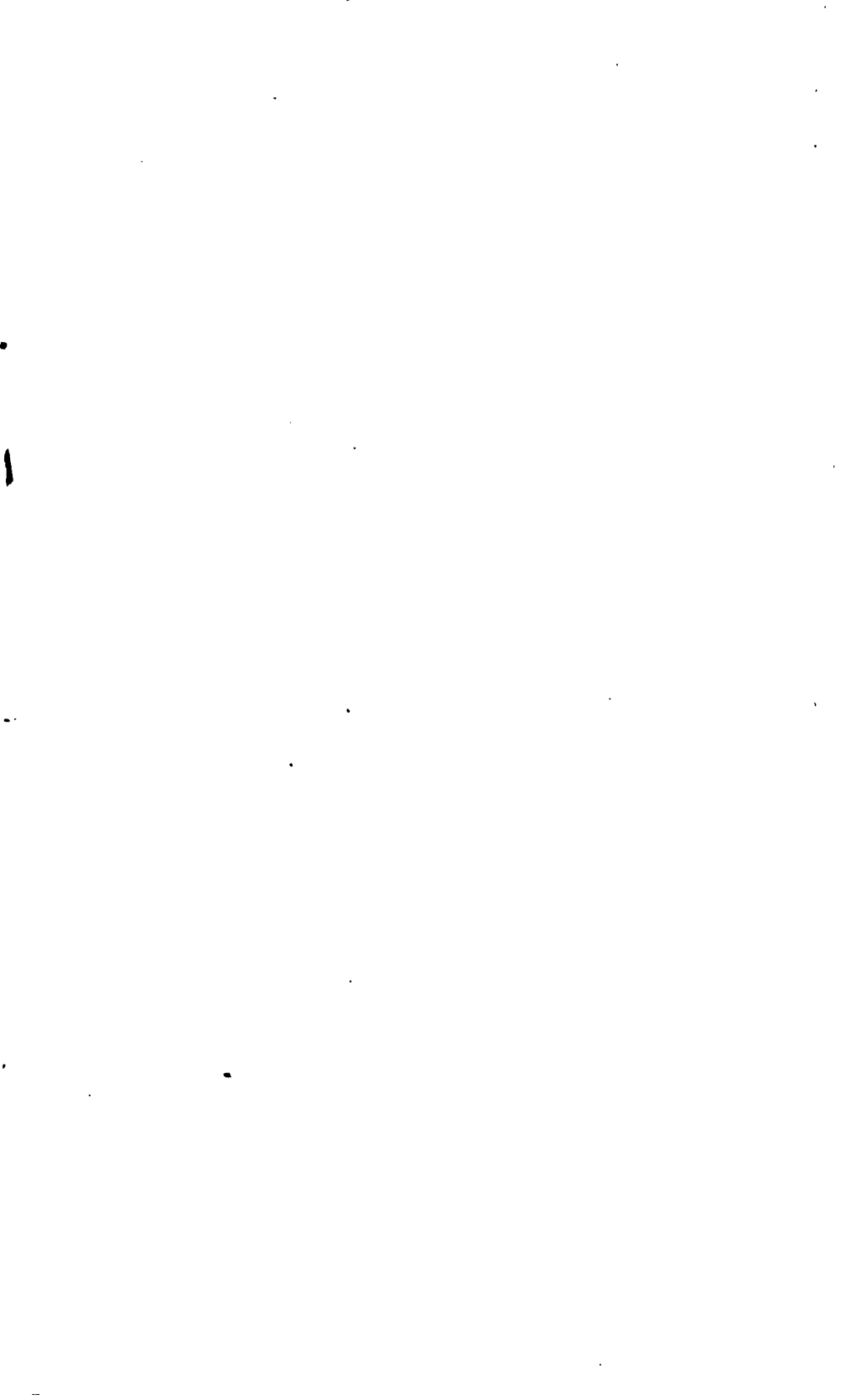
The boy lowered his eyes and blushed, with all the trepidation of a shy youth who finds himself suddenly called to account by his seniors.

"You are very free with your advice, young gentleman. What do you mean by it, pray?"

The blush on Harold's cheek deepened, but still he did not answer.

"Come, speak up, young fellow, you were ready enough with your tongue just now. And







# THE HEIR EXPECTANT.

## CHAPTER I.

### TIME TRIES ALL.

**M**ORE than twenty-one years had passed since the evening on which the Waters family, assembled in the humble parlor of their little house in Liverpool, had received the unexpected visit of Uncle Gilbert.

It was the afternoon of a bleak March day, and again, in a yet humbler parlor this time, the Waters family sat assembled. The Waters family—for the identity of a household must be supposed to endure so long as the husband and father lives, and here was present not only the same Austin Waters who had sat at one end of the tea-table twenty-one years ago, but the same Agnes who had smiled at him so lovingly from the other. But though the husband and wife were the same, all their surroundings were different, all the circumstances of their family life were changed. There was only one fact which, having existed through all these one-and-twenty years, and existing still, might be said to give a kind of unity to their history during the period; and even that fact, however paramount it might be in their thoughts and feelings, was, after all, external to themselves and their home circle.

#### UNCLE GILBERT WAS STILL ALIVE.

Every thing else was changed. There in Liverpool their family circle had comprised a light-hearted school-boy and three rosy-cheeked sturdy children; here at Chorcombe their sole companion was a girl who, born about three years after the transplantation of the household, was now about eighteen years of age—Emily, or Emmy as she was generally called, their daughter and only child.

Their only child; it was even so. The Austy and Aggy and baby Harry who had gladdened the first years of their married life had long ago been laid to rest in Chorcombe church-yard, smitten down within a few weeks of each other by a low fever which soon after Emmy's birth had been very fatal in the village, especially in damp and ill-drained houses, and more especially when the occupants of such houses were poor and needy. And to this class, in spite of his relationship to the richest man of the place, Austin Waters emphatically belonged. A family doomed to keep up appearances on a hundred a year can not be other than poor and needy; and even in the midst of their direst need, with one child sickening after another, and a scanty exchequer still further impoverished by the recent advent of a new baby and the slow recovery of the mother—even in this dark hour Uncle Gilbert could not

be induced to add a farthing to his nephew's allowance. How Austin had got through the troubles of that time at all was a matter of surprise to those best acquainted with his difficulties; still get through them he did, with that terrible drawback of the loss of all his elder children.

Another member of the household yet remains to be accounted for, the school-boy Harold Maxwell, who not only was never seen in it now, but whose very name was seldom if ever breathed by those to whom it was once so familiar. Under this silence was shrouded one of the heaviest trials that the family had been called upon to suffer, to explain which a few words of retrospective narrative will be necessary.

One day about eighteen years ago—it was just when the husband and wife were at the commencement of their worst troubles, with a baby a few weeks old to provide for, and the elder children down with the fever—the good people of Chorcombe had a great sensation. It was whispered that old Mr. Waters up at the great house had lost some money by a forgery, and that his suspicions pointed to his nephew's brother-in-law as the delinquent.

The rumor of such a charge brought against any one personally known to them in however slight a degree must always produce a stir among the inhabitants of a place like Chorcombe—a large village rather than a town. Harold Maxwell had been but seldom seen there, having passed most of his time during the last three years at Oxford, and never spending at his sister's house more than a day or two of his vacations in consequence of old Mr. Waters's known antipathy to him. Nevertheless the news of the suspicion that had fallen on him travelled through the neighborhood like wild-fire, and before the report was half a day old all the facts of the case had been elicited, so far as they were to be elicited at all, for the benefit of the community at large.

It appeared that a draft bearing the forged name of the elder Mr. Waters had been presented a few days before at a London bank where that gentleman kept an account. The money, to the amount of a hundred pounds, had been paid without question, and the fraud might have escaped detection for an indefinite time, but that the old man had at this juncture taken it into his head to withdraw his deposit from the bank, thus necessitating a balancing of accounts. Immediately on the discovery of the disparity between the bank's reckoning and the depositor's, there had been a brisk interchange of complaint and explanation, and the clerk who had paid the



money on the forged document was sent down to Chorcombe to give a description of the person who had passed it. It was from this description that Gilbert Waters, who had always been violently prejudiced against young Harold from the first day of their acquaintance, had conceived the suspicion which now created such excitement in the neighborhood.

That excitement was greatly increased when it further became known to the Chorcombe gossips that their village was to be the scene of the young man's apprehension and confrontation with the accusing witness. He was daily expected to pass through Chorcombe on his return from a walking-tour in Wales, with which he was occupying a fortnight's holiday that intervened between the conclusion of his University studies and the time appointed for him to enter on the duties of a recently accepted engagement as tutor in a Cornish gentleman's family. As all his books and heavy luggage had been left at his sister's house, where he had paid a flying visit at the beginning of his holiday, it was supposed that he might be confidently looked for; and the people of Chorcombe anticipated his coming with an eager impatience damped only by a lurking doubt (a doubt induced as much by the old man's unpopularity as by their own good-nature) whether he was guilty, after all.

But this doubt quickly began to grow faint when a day or two went by and Harold Maxwell did not arrive. Was it possible he was going to disappoint them? Fainter and fainter waxed the benevolent doubt, and stronger and stronger became the malevolent impatience, as day followed day and still the young man failed to appear. At length all doubt was put an end to, at the same time that impatience was finally balked, by the news that a person answering his description had shortly before been seen in a provincial sea-port, making particular inquiries as to rates of passage and times of departure. Those were before the days of submarine telegraphs, and the bringing back of a suspected criminal when once he had made his escape across the seas was seldom or never thought of.

The fury of Gilbert Waters at the impunity of the forger and thief (for of course flight was tantamount to an avowal of guilt) knew no bounds. For a long time the affair was expected to cost Austin and his family all hope of their promised inheritance, so outrageous was the old man's anger, especially against Mrs. Waters, whom he scrupled not to accuse of having prevented her brother's return by sending him timely warning of his danger. But at last he became gradually mollified, perhaps because his sense of justice was moved by the consideration that, having published his suspicions so widely as he had, he might himself have been the means of bringing them to the delinquent's ears; or perhaps because he felt some gleam of pity for the unfortunate parents who were by this time mourning over the deaths of their children; or perhaps simply because his *amour-propre* was satisfied by the submission made to him in all things by his nephew, including the concession of his claim over the fugitive's books and other effects. However that may have been, certain it was that after a few months the relations of uncle and nephew became pretty much what they had been before; that is to say, Austin's services were put in requi-

sition as often as they could be made available, and the hundred a year was paid in regular quarterly installments. By degrees, also, old Gilbert in his ordinary intercourse with his nephew left off harping on Harold Maxwell and his misdoings, reserving the subject for occasions of extra ill-humor, as one which he had discovered to be specially painful to the younger man's feelings.

It need hardly be said that when Gilbert Waters had thus comparatively forgotten a topic once of such all-absorbing importance to him, it had long ceased to occupy the attention of even the most inveterate of the village gossips. As years passed on, the affair dwindled from the proportions of contemporary history into those of tradition, and at last a generation had sprung up who had scarcely heard of it even in the latter form. By this time there were dwellers in Chorcombe to whom the very name of Harold Maxwell was unknown, and of those that remembered it there were few who could have given an off-hand answer to the question whether he was alive or dead. For of course the subject was not one to be talked of to Mr. and Mrs. Austin Waters, and there were no others in the village who could be supposed to have any accurate information of his fate.

The tale of past sorrow and bereavement, of still enduring anxiety and privation, would have told itself very plainly to any observant spectator present in that little parlor where the Waters family now sat in conclave. A little parlor, and yet as far as possible from being snug—with threadbare carpet, old horsehair chairs whose rusty black was here and there made more conspicuous by a patch of comparatively fresh material, naked-looking walls which a vain attempt had been made to enliven by one or two old-fashioned black-framed prints, a small and struggling fire, and a narrow ill-fitting window which rattled with every new gust that swept the dusty village street without. The scanty and uninviting remains of a frugal dinner were on the table, at one end of which sat Austin Waters, no longer noisy and ruddy and jovial-looking as of yore, but with subdued demeanor, pale face, and grizzled hair, and a gaunt frame on which his clothes seemed to hang loosely and flabbily. Opposite to him sat his wife, on whose dejected bearing and sad anxious countenance the ravages of time and care had written themselves no less distinctly than on his own. She was still mild and ladylike as ever (ladylike in spite of the shabby old-fashioned gown in which she was arrayed, and which was as shabby and old-fashioned as was compatible with the standard of gentility imposed on the family by their tyrant), but her whole manner was pervaded by an air of depression which to any one who had known her in old days must have been very touching.

The third member of the group was the only one who did not bear the external stamp of the family poverty. A fresh round-faced maiden, with dimpled cheeks, full rosy lips, wavy light brown hair that seemed permanently tinged by a gleam of sunshine, and wide-open hazel eyes undimmed by fear or trouble—it was evident that this only child of struggling and care-worn parents had been shielded by their love and self-sacrifice from all the worst evils of their lot. The mother had borne a double share of privation that the daughter's young life might be un-

clouded, and the mother's object had been attained. That the girl's spirit was still uncrushed and unbroken was apparent not only in her every look and gesture, but even in the little details of her toilet. She was dressed simply and inexpensively enough in all conscience, in a brown stuff gown that some young ladies might deem it a misfortune to have to wear; but then the gown itself and all the little accessories of collar and cuffs were disposed with a care and elaborateness which showed a mind perfectly at ease, while the arrangement of the wavy light brown hair was so ingenious, and at the same time so becoming, that to a severe critic it might have suggested coquettishness. And, sooth to say, this was a quality which some of Emmy's female friends and neighbors did not stick at attributing to her. But local scandal is always untrustworthy, and as some of the same female friends and neighbors also declared that she wasn't a bit pretty, but on the contrary rather plain than otherwise—an assertion in which they were undeniably more or less mistaken—it may be fairly hoped that one charge was as unfounded as the other.

Whatever of coquettishness there may or may not have been about Emmy under ordinary circumstances, there was certainly none of it in her manner at the present moment. A discussion was going forward in which she evidently took a deep and serious interest, her face being turned towards her father with an air of gravity and ripe wisdom prettily contrasting with its juvenile softness and roundness of outline.

"It may be true or it may not," Austin Waters was saying, "but I tell you I dare not go again to-day. If I were to inquire at the door even, he would be sure to hear of it, and there is no knowing what he might not do. Why, it was only this morning he taunted me with being in a hurry, just for asking if he had had a good night; and if he was to hear that I had been calling again—And besides, I shouldn't wonder if it is a mistake all the time; very likely he is not a bit worse than he was yesterday. When did you say John Thwaites told you?"

"About an hour ago, papa. Mamma and I met him as we were coming back from our walk, and he said he had just heard from Dr. Plummer that Uncle Gilbert was very ill. So I suppose it really must be true that Dr. Plummer said so, for I don't see how Mr. Thwaites or any body else could make a mistake about a thing like that."

The last words were accompanied by a slight, almost imperceptible, toss of the head, which may have been given however only by way of emphasis.

"Very likely Dr. Plummer said so," answered the father, not without a touch of querulousness in his voice. "But then did Dr. Plummer say so after ten o'clock this morning, when I saw Uncle Gilbert with my own eyes, no worse than he has been any time these six months? Any body who didn't know him as well as I do would of course say he was very ill, lying shaking all over with palsy as he does, and so they would have said last week, or last month, or last year, for that matter, but their saying so wouldn't have proved much, you see." And here the touch of querulousness became so audible that the speaker probably noticed it himself, for he went on in somewhat altered tones to inquire: "And it is only John

Thwaites who has told you any thing about this, then?"

"Oh! only John Thwaites," answered the girl lightly, flinging back, as she spoke, one of her long curls with so becoming an air of carelessness and disdain that it was difficult to believe her altogether unconscious of it.

"You might have been a little more careful in getting the particulars out of him, I think," said Austin rather harshly.

"Perhaps we ought, papa," answered Emmy. "But we could not stand talking to him all day," and again the curl was flung back.

He got up, and made a few steps to and fro, manifestly under strong excitement.

"If I only knew what to believe—whether any thing has happened since morning, that is the question. Suppose I go and ask Dr. Plummer—but no, every thing is sure to be reported. I think sometimes he must set spies on me, upon my word and honor I do; he contrives to find out every thing, bedridden as he is. And if I did the least thing to offend him I believe he wouldn't mind disappointing me even now; yes, now, even now, after I have given up all my life to him—that is, if he was offended, you know. Ah! you would think so too if you heard the things he says sometimes."

He shuddered, and paced the room more excitedly than ever, the eyes of his wife and daughter uneasily following him.

"He is always casting it up to me that I never would have taken his hundred a year if I had expected him to live to such an age—he likes talking about that, because he thinks he made such a good bargain. And then he keeps asking if there is any hurry, and if I can make it convenient to wait a year or two longer; and whatever I say to answer him, he only grins and chuckles to himself as if it were the best joke in the world. And once—I never told you this because I tried to forget it—once, when I said something about hoping to wait a great many years longer, he laughed and answered it was a good thing not to be impatient, for who could tell what disappointment might be in store, after all. But then that was only to tease me, I'm sure, eh, Agnes—eh, Emmy? Only to tease me?"

"Oh yes! of course, papa," said Emmy promptly, but Mrs. Waters did not answer.

"Oh yes! of course," he repeated, coming to a stand-still beside his wife's chair. "You think so too, Agnes, don't you?"

"I hope so, dear," she responded tremulously.

He looked at her with strangely-troubled eyes, then said hoarsely:

"You hope so? what do you mean by that? You do not think so, then?"

"I don't know, dear. It is better not to be too confident about any thing."

"You do not think so, then?"

She was silent. For another second or two he stood looking at her as though waiting for an answer, then turned abruptly on his heel, saying sharply:

"You are a fool!"

"Papa, papa!" expostulated Emmy, "how can you talk like that? You dear, dear mamma," she went on, rising to throw both arms round her mother's neck, "don't mind what he says; you know he doesn't mean it. My own sweet mamma, give me a kiss—there."

Mrs. Waters smiled, and kissed her daughter fondly.

It was very pleasant to her to have those soft arms clinging about her, and to feel herself so loved as she knew she was by their owner. And yet, if the truth must be told, in the very warmth of the girl's demonstrations there was a tone of protection which, had Mrs. Waters been less accustomed to it, might have jarred upon her feelings as something like patronage. For the fact was, that Emmy, while loving her mother dearly and tenderly, was half unconsciously disposed to underrate that mother's social importance as compared with her father's. Her father was the nephew and chosen heir of the great man of the village (for penurious as he was, Uncle Gilbert kept up a sort of style which vindicated his claim to lord it over his neighbors), the man whom, if nobody loved, every body respected, and whom Emmy in particular, though no fonder of him than the others, had been brought up to regard as the arbiter of her destinies. Her father therefore, representing the wealth and gentility of the family, shone in her eyes with a reflected glory not shared by her mother, who had no rich relations, and on whom the great man of the village notoriously looked with disfavor. And not only this; her mother might be said in an indirect way to represent the disgrace of the family, inflicted on it long ago by the crime of that dreadful Uncle Harold, whose very name was under such a ban that Emmy might never have heard it but for sundry taunting allusions made by the old man when he was in more than usually bad humor. So, having got the notion into her head that her mother was somehow under a cloud, it was natural that she should allow her fondness to assume something of a protecting tone.

She continued standing by Mrs. Waters's chair, putting forth her neat little hands caressingly to smooth the soft bands of silver-streaked hair over which she bent.

"Not but what I think, mamma dear, you were quite mistaken," she went on glancing up at her father, who still paced the room in angry disquietude. "How you can imagine that Uncle Gilbert could act so dishonorably after all his promises—I know he is very unkind sometimes, but he values his character as a gentleman too much to think of such a thing for a moment, I am sure."

Perhaps it was not every body who would have credited Uncle Gilbert with having the character of a gentleman to value. But he was rich, and it was a weakness of Emmy's to take for granted that all rich people were gentlemen or ladies. And if any are disposed to blame her for this undue worship of wealth, it must be remembered that she had seen wealth worshipped and sacrificed to from her childhood up.

Her father caught eagerly at her words.

"Of course, of course!" he cried, coming once more to a halt. "Why, Agnes, you see, the very child understands about it better than you do. His character as a gentleman—just so. Go on, Emmy, go on. His character as a gentleman."

"Yes, papa, that is my firm opinion," resumed Emmy, not without some sententiousness of manner, for she was gratified by this appreciation of her logic. "Whatever Uncle Gilbert may be, he is too much of a gentleman to break his word

when you have given him no just cause of offense. And so, dear papa, and dear mamma too, you may both make your minds perfectly easy."

She spoke so coaxingly, and with so pretty an air of conviction withal, that her father's brow visibly cleared, and even her mother felt somewhat reassured. Perhaps the girl herself had an idea that she showed to advantage, for she put up her hand to give an adjusting touch to her collar, at the same time glancing across the room at one of the old-fashioned black-framed prints already mentioned, one of which, being covered with glass and hanging in a dark corner, was capable of doing duty on occasion as a substitute for a mirror.

She seemed about to follow up her argument, and might probably have held forth some time longer, when, her eyes having momentarily wandered towards the window, her attention was effectually diverted from the matter in hand.

"There is Uncle Gilbert's man. Is he coming to us, I wonder?"

The question was almost immediately answered by a ring at the bell, and, with a sudden flush of his pale cheeks, Austin Waters hurried into the passage to the street-door. On opening it, he did not stop to ask questions, but, apparently too much agitated to speak, beckoned the newcomer inside, and led the way back to the parlor, where his wife and daughter waited in anxious expectation.

The messenger was a young man of rather rough and rustic appearance for a gentleman's servant (he had been driving pigs three months before), dressed in a suit which did not fit him, and which since it was new had been worn by some half-dozen predecessors in his master's service, for the *personnel* of Uncle Gilbert's household was constantly shifting. There was a brief pause, during which he stood twirling his hat in a way which would have put his employer in a fever of alarm for the nap, and then, finding that every body was waiting for him to speak, he blurted out:

"If you please, master, the old master wants to see you d'rectly. He's bin took worse, and doctor says as how he must go off this time."

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Waters spoke. The news which they had expected for so many years, and had thought to hear long ere this, had taken them by surprise, now that it *had* really come. Both husband and wife were deadly pale, and the former was trembling violently. The silence was at last broken by Emmy.

"He is very ill, then? How did it come on? how long ago? It must have been very sudden."

"It wur about twelve o'clock, miss, 'cause just afore he'd been going on at Mrs. Muggridge for being late with his beef-tea; we thought he'd ha' bin out of bed a'most in his tantrums. So she got it ready in double-quick time, but when she brought it, and he tried to sit up to take it, he couldn't, and then he tried to speak, and couldn't speak plain. We see'd d'rectly it wur another stroke, and Mrs. Muggridge she wur for sending at once to tell you, but he kep' shaking his head and trying to say as plain as he could he'd be better soon. He wurn't even for seeing the doctor, and wouldn't only we fetched him unbeknown, and he couldn't help himself. Well, doctor he pulled a long face, and said it wur a bad

job, but master he answered very cross he wur going to get well, for all that, and wouldn't hear of us telling you nor nobody else. Howsomever, he has kep' on getting deader and deader all up his side, and as cold as a lump o' lead, and doctor he called again just now, and said it wur a worser job nor he thought, and wouldn't it be better to send for Mr. Austin, and master he seemed to understand it wur all up, for he said yes and let him be quick about it, and then he went into a doze and doctor thinks p'raps he'll go off so."

Having delivered himself thus with some difficulty and with great detriment to his hat, which he kept twirling about all the time as an aid to his eloquence, the narrator came to a full stop, glad to have done his part.

"Poor Uncle Gilbert! how very sad!" sighed Emmy.

And though some people might have thought the sigh hypocritical under the circumstances, it was probably quite genuine. Emmy had not suffered from Uncle Gilbert as her father and mother had suffered, and could afford to compassionate him at this supreme crisis.

Austin Waters suddenly roused himself; Emmy's remark seemed to remind him of something he had forgotten.

"Ah! very sad," he echoed, but it was in a husky constrained voice quite different from Emmy's. "Poor Uncle Gilbert, I am afraid—Give me my hat, child, there. Now then, my good fellow, I am quite ready."

And in another moment Austin Waters was out of the house and on his way to the old man's bedside, leaving his wife and daughter to await in uneasy suspense what news he might bring back. Would he or would he not return as Uncle Gilbert's heir?

## CHAPTER II.

### VISITORS.

THE mother and daughter, thus left alone, sat for some time without speaking. At last Emmy raised her bright eyes from the floor, and turned them towards her mother with an inquiring look rather at variance with the confidence which she immediately went on to express:

"It will all come right, mamma; I am sure it will."

"God grant that it may, my darling. If it does not, I don't know what will become of us."

Emmy sat looking before her very thoughtfully. Presently, without raising her eyes this time, she resumed hesitatingly:

"I shouldn't be nervous about it for a moment, only Uncle Gilbert is so very strict and severe, and I am afraid he is prejudiced against us about—on account of—that affair with—because of—of Uncle Harold, you know."

She sunk her voice as she came to the forbidden name, and glanced deprecatingly at her mother, as though almost fearing the effect of words which were so unfamiliar that it was a sort of experiment to utter them. Mrs. Waters had turned a shade paler, and for a minute her breath seemed to come and go more quickly than usual; but when at last she spoke it was with such composure that Emmy felt relieved of half her timidity.

"I dare say you are right, Emmy."

"Yes, he thinks of it still sometimes, I am sure, and that is the only thing that frightens me," continued the girl, speaking with more rapidity, now that the ice was broken. "If he should take it into his head to visit upon us—Ah! how cruel and unjust it would be, and yet I am almost afraid sometimes. It is very hard. Just as if any body could help having bad relations; just as if it was papa's fault, or yours, or mine, to have a wicked person connected—"

"Emmy!" cried her mother.

Emmy had been growing warmer and warmer in her subject, but the tone of mingled appeal and command in which she was addressed brought her instantly to a stop. Her mother's face wore an expression of positive suffering.

"Remember it is my brother you are speaking of," said Mrs. Waters faintly, as their eyes met.

"I am so sorry, mamma," faltered Emmy. "But after all these years I did not think you cared—"

"It is my brother," repeated Mrs. Waters.

Emmy dropped her eyes penitently and did not answer. She was vexed with herself for having given her mother pain, and perhaps a little vexed with her mother also for being so easily put to pain. For Emmy had never known what it was to have a brother or sister of her own, and secretly thought it very strange that her mamma should be capable of feeling any remnant of regard for a person who had caused such disgrace and misfortune to his family as had been wrought by Harold Maxwell.

For some time she sat silent, pondering on what appeared to her so curious an anomaly in her mother's character. From this her thoughts gradually wandered to other, though kindred, topics of speculation, in which at last she got so interested that, very timidly and cautiously, she ventured upon another remark.

"I suppose you don't know any thing about Uncle Harold now, mamma?"

Such an inquiry surely argued Emmy to be in a more than usually suspicious mood, seeing that, only a few weeks before, she had heard old Gilbert Waters put the same question to her father and receive a solemn assurance in the negative.

These repeated references to her brother were evidently very painful to Mrs. Waters.

"Know any thing of him?" she answered in some agitation, "what should we know of him? Emmy, what are you thinking of, what—"

"Oh! it was very ridiculous of me, certainly," assented Emmy, suddenly struck by the absurdity of the question. "I only just asked for curiosity, for of course I knew already it was quite impossible—indeed I heard papa say so only the other day. I wonder how Uncle Gilbert is."

And thus the subject of Harold Maxwell was dropped for the present. Not that Emmy could not have found plenty more to say about it, but the theme was one on which she had from childhood been accustomed to restrain her curiosity, some of the worst scoldings she had ever incurred having been provoked from her father by attempts to find out something concerning this unknown uncle of hers.

The conversation fell back on the old dreary topic of Gilbert Waters and the confidence which was or was not to be placed in his good faith,

when a brisk knock sounding at the street-door caused the girl to start up with an exclamation that was almost joyful.

"Miss Egerton! I know her knock."

And with eager alacrity Emmy ran out to open the door.

"Why, Emmy!" said a clear ringing voice.

"Oh! Miss Egerton, it is such a comfort to see you! Come and speak to mamma."

With these words Emmy ushered in the newcomer, who, going straight up to Mrs. Waters, gave her a hearty kiss.

"Dear Mrs. Waters! Now for goodness' sake keep up your spirits, or I shall run away again directly."

Mrs. Waters looked up and smiled, half comforted already. There was something so fresh and cordial in the speaker's voice and manner that her presence in that gloomy household had something of the effect of a breeze of morning air let into a sick-chamber.

The visitor was a young lady who might safely be called graceful, for her figure was tall and well-formed, and moreover characterized by a certain undulating elegance of movement that gave an air of ease to all she did. That she could correctly be styled beautiful, or even pretty, was not quite so self-evident, and perhaps it would not have occurred to any body seeing her for the first time to think so. Probably, however, this was not so much the fault of her features as of her complexion, which, though perfectly clear and smooth, was as dark as a brunette's, while it lacked, except on rare occasions of excitement, the ordinary brunette's richness of color. On those rare occasions she would perhaps have commanded admiration even at first sight, for her features were for the most part good and sufficiently regular, and her face was always lighted up by a pair of large gray eyes which, contrasting strikingly with her almost black hair and long dark eyelashes, would under any circumstances have redeemed her appearance from the charge of commonplace. She has been called a young lady, but she was some years past her first youth, being now some five or six-and-twenty years of age.

"It was so kind of you to come," said Mrs. Waters gratefully. "Have you heard—"

"Of old Mr. Waters being so ill—oh yes! I have been shopping in the village, and heard all about it; that is why I am here. I thought you might like to see a friend."

"Dear Miss Egerton," said Emmy, "you are always so good. Won't you take a chair? And do let me put down your umbrella."

As Emmy hovered about the visitor with these little offers of service, the most casual observer might have seen that she was actuated by very sincere liking and affection. Yet it might also have been noticed that with liking and affection there was mingled a certain deference which to those who best knew her would have suggested that Miss Egerton must be a person of considerable consequence in the world.

And indeed in the little world of Chorcombe Miss Egerton was a person of very great consequence, being neither more nor less than the largest landed proprietor in the neighborhood. All that great estate lying a little way westward of Chorcombe, and known as Egerton Park, was hers to dispose of as she would; so that if Uncle Gilbert by virtue of his wealth was the great

man of the village, Miss Egerton, by virtue of wealth and social importance combined, was the great lady of the whole district, a position which she had occupied during the past three years. Only during three years, for she had not been born to her present dignities or even brought up to expect them, and this circumstance was generally held to account for sundry peculiarities in her modes of life and thinking which had procured her with some people a character for eccentricity, and certainly distinguished her from most young ladies moving in county society.

And here a glance at Miss Egerton's antecedents will not be out of place.

She was the only child of a younger son of the Egerton family, who, having irrevocably offended his relations by marrying a penniless governess and dying when his daughter was still in early youth, had left her with hardly any other resource for her maintenance and that of an invalid mother than what a good education and her own industry might supply. At the age of sixteen Olivia Egerton was supporting herself and contributing to the support of her mother, by teaching from morning to night in a boarding-school; and a boarding-school teacher she continued to be for years without assistance or recognition from any of her father's relations, who for the rest were scarcely aware of her existence. At last, some years after she had been left alone in the world by the loss of her mother, the startling intelligence reached her through the family lawyer that the stumble of a horse in the hunting-field and the consequent death of an unknown cousin had made her mistress of Egerton Park and some ten thousand a year in rents. The intelligence was very startling, for at Clare Court, about ten miles from Chorcombe, lived another branch of the family, which, though younger than that represented by Olivia, had always kept up friendly relations at Egerton Park, so that neither Olivia nor any one else had doubted that the property would be bequeathed to the Clare Court people in the failure of direct heirs. And so it unquestionably would have been if the last owner had troubled himself to bequeath it to any body, but he had been a young man, full of life, and thinking rather of marriage than of death, besides which, the existence of Olivia was so utterly ignored and forgotten that the possibility of her heiress-ship had never been so much as taken into account. Thus it came to pass that, aided by her very obscurity and insignificance, the boarding-school teacher suddenly found herself metamorphosed into a great county magnate.

She was considered to bear her honors very well, on the whole, though, as has been said, there were sundry peculiarities about her which were thought to need apology. For instance, it is undoubtedly a great peculiarity in a wealthy heiress to go on living with nobody but a paid lady-companion of middle age, when she might choose a husband among half the handsome young men of the county; and Olivia, though mixing much in society, and even entering into its enjoyments with apparent zest, had set her face steadily against all the admirers and would-be suitors by whom she was beleaguered. Then again she was a little more frank and free-spoken in her manners, a little more independent and self-helpful in her ways, than was quite consistent with the standard of propriety prescribed by provincial

chaperons. She was more often seen on foot than in her carriage, more often alone than with her companion, and delighted in taking long rambles up hill and down dale without regard to dust or mud. It was in the course of these solitary walks that soon after her first arrival in the neighborhood she had gradually made the acquaintance of Mrs. Waters and Emmy, first passing them with a friendly nod, then stopping to say good day, and at last engaging them in long confidential chats. She had taken a great fancy to Emmy at a very early period of their friendship, and, sorry to see the girl's education neglected—as in the circumstances of her parents it necessarily was, so far at least as accomplishments were concerned—had offered to send her to school at her own expense. But much as Mr. and Mrs. Waters might have liked to close with this proposal, they dared not listen to it for a moment, knowing that old Gilbert would have furiously resented their acceptance of what he would have considered charity from a stranger. It was therefore ultimately settled that Emmy should go pretty frequently up to Egerton House to let Miss Egerton hear her play and to sketch the park trees; the practical meaning of this being that Miss Egerton constituted herself Emmy's unpaid teacher in music and drawing. For nearly three years this arrangement had continued in full force, and Emmy, having been an apt pupil, was now fairly proficient in both accomplishments. She had really therefore some reason to regard Miss Egerton as a friend to be loved, no less than as a great lady to be looked up to.

"You are a good child, Emmy," said the visitor, smiling kindly at the neat little figure that fluttered about her. "You are always glad to see me, I know, though I do make such a fuss about perspective."

"Oh yes! indeed I am always glad, Miss Egerton. And to-day especially; papa is gone to Uncle Gilbert's, and we are so dull and miserable, you can't think. And then mamma is making herself so dreadfully anxious and unhappy; we needed somebody to come and argue her out of it."

"I am ready to argue to any extent, my dear, but you must give me my subject first. What is your mamma making herself so anxious about?"

"She is afraid of Uncle Gilbert's breaking his word and leaving his money to somebody else," answered Emmy, looking slightly shame-faced.

"Oh! dear Miss Egerton, we are not mercenary, but after all we have gone through we can't help thinking about it. Only, as I tell her, he never could be so dishonorable, could he now, could he? So it is quite absurd to frighten ourselves, eh?"

"It is always quite absurd to frighten one's self about money, Emmy. It makes uncommonly little real difference."

"No, but seriously—" began Emmy.

"Seriously, my dear Emmy, and seriously, my dear Mrs. Waters—I never was more in earnest in my life. You wish for this money yourselves, and therefore I wish it for you, but I seriously think it quite possible that you might be better without it than with it."

"Oh! Miss Egerton!" remonstrated Emmy.

"If we had only enough to live on—" faltered Mrs. Waters.

"Yes, enough, that would be best, of course;

but when the question is between too much and too little, I am not at all sure that too little has the worst of it; and mind, I ought to know, for I've tried both. When I had too little, I had to work hard to make, and now that I have too much I have to work hard to spend, that's all. No, that is not quite all either; when people were kind to me then, I knew they meant it, but when they are kind to me now, I am pretty sure they are only thinking of my money. Ah! Emmy, child, if you are afraid of disappointment, let it be a comfort to you to think that then, at all events, your friends really would be your friends."

But Emmy was not to be comforted so easily in view of the dread contingency which Miss Egerton seemed to contemplate, and only shook her head dolefully.

"Ah! if I could only know that of my friends!" went on Miss Egerton—and here there was a touch of bitterness in the clear ringing voice not natural to it. "I know it of you and your mother, I am sure I do; but I believe that out of this room there is not a creature in the world that cares a straw about me apart from my rents and banker's book. And yet so many dear friends as I have—oh! you would hardly credit how many there are, and what pretty things they say: if I thought such things could be said to me for my own sake I should be in a seventh heaven of delight and self-complacency. But then, unfortunately, I know that money is very attractive, and I am also quite aware that I myself am not attractive in the least."

She made a little break, and looked at her hearers as though expecting them to say something in the way of polite acquiescence, or possibly of still more polite contradiction. But though they might very well have taken the opportunity of putting in a compliment if they had chosen, and this without by any means compromising their veracity, they were so much engrossed in their own anxieties that they never thought of answering a word. So, after waiting an instant, Miss Egerton went on again with a slight sigh.

"Yes, you see that is all the good my money has done me—to make me despise the world and its professions. But, never mind, Emmy, that needn't be your case, you know; you have found out already that it is quite possible for people to like you for your own sake. Ah! you may think yourself a lucky girl, for if ever there was a truer, homester, manlier young fellow than that John Thwaites—"

"John Thwaites, indeed!" said Emmy, tossing her head with superb disdain, but at the same time turning very red. "The idea of that creature John Thwaites—"

"No now, Emmy, whatever you do, don't despise him. If you can't like him as well as he likes you, you can't, and there is an end of it; though it is my private opinion—but never mind, I dare say I should only get a scolding for saying what my private opinion is. Only, whatever you do, don't give yourself airs, and pretend to look down on him—not even if Uncle Gilbert leaves you every penny of his money—for he doesn't deserve it. No, take the advice of an old woman, for you know I am an old woman compared to you—"

Here there was another little break, which might have given Emmy an opportunity of put-

ting in a word, but she was too much occupied in a pouting examination of the hem of her pocket-handkerchief to attend to any thing else, and Miss Egerton resumed:

"Take the advice of an old woman, and be thankful that you have been able to win an honest man's love without money to help you. For he loves you with all his heart, Emmy, I am sure; and oh! when you think of that, how fortunate you may count yourself, and how little you need care for the paltry money that Uncle Gilbert may or may not leave you!"

Emmy was as red as fire by this time, but kept examining her handkerchief so persistently that hardly any thing of her face could be seen. She did not speak for some time after Miss Egerton had finished, but at last, finding that an answer was expected, she managed to bring out a few words, with a careful avoidance, however, of John Thwaites.

"You seem to be quite sure that we are going to be disappointed, Miss Egerton."

"I can not be quite sure, dear. But I want to make you feel that it is not of so much consequence as you appear to think."

"Not of consequence! What! when perhaps we are going to be left without a farthing in the world!"

"That is the dreadful part of it," said Mrs. Waters mournfully. "It is not because I want to be so very rich, I am sure; but when I think how destitute and helpless—and the blow too that it would be to my poor husband— Oh! don't despise me, but indeed I can not help it."

She covered her face with her hands, unable to restrain her tears at the picture of desolation which her fancy had conjured. Miss Egerton sat looking at her very tenderly, then rose somewhat abruptly, exclaiming:

"What a Job's comforter I am, to be sure! it is high time you were rid of me. Dear Mrs. Waters, I beg a thousand pardons; I wanted to prepare you for the worst, and I have done it a great deal more effectually than I intended. Now good-bye, and let us think of nothing but the best, only if the worst should really come, remember" (here she lowered her voice, and, approaching Mrs. Waters to take leave, spoke the words almost into her ear), "remember I am what they call rich, and I would as soon be poor if my best friends won't let me be of a little use to them. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

With these words, and a kiss warmly impressed on the poor lady's cheek, Miss Egerton turned to go, followed into the little passage by Emmy, who, in spite of the lecture about John Thwaites, hung about the visitor as affectionately as ever, and parted from her with evident reluctance.

"Good-bye, dear Miss Egerton. How we are ever to thank you for all your kindness—"

"Oh! nonsense, child, don't speak about that. There, kiss me and let me go—but stop a moment first; promise me you will think a little of what I have said about poor John Thwaites."

"Oh! as for that," said Emmy, shaking her curls, "really—" Here she opened the door with a great clatter which caused her remaining words, if any, to be lost.

"Oh! you want me to go, now that I have begun again on John Thwaites, do you! Well, I'll please you, child, and I think you'll try to please me a little too, especially as I believe it will

be pleasing yourself into the bargain. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Emmy with very hot cheeks, but not otherwise taking any notice of what had gone before, and even forcing herself, in spite of her hot cheeks, to stand at the door just as usual to look after Miss Egerton as she passed through the tiny ten-foot-square garden and up the village street.

But hardly had Miss Egerton got twenty yards beyond the garden-gate, when, turning hastily out of a side-street, there almost knocked against her a young man, who, having received from the heiress in passing a particularly friendly nod, immediately afterwards caught sight of Emmy and came hurrying towards where she stood.

Emmy gave another shake to her curls as though gathering confidence for an encounter, and then, scorning retreat, set herself to await the young man's approach with the most perfect appearance of unconcern that she could summon up under the circumstances. It must be admitted that her position was one of considerable embarrassment, for she was standing on the doorstep in full view of any body who might be passing in the street, and the person now coming towards her was no other than that creature John Thwaites.

A word here about this John Thwaites. He was clerk in a large paper-mill near Chorcombe, where he had consequently come to live a year or two before. It happened that where he lodged he was a near neighbor of Mr. and Mrs. Waters, and near neighbors in a place like Chorcombe always get to know each other more or less. By this time he had formed a tolerably intimate friendship with the family, and, as has been shown, was suspected of feeling a good deal more than friendship for one member of it. For the rest, he was a personable young fellow enough, with well-knit figure of middle size, open good-natured face, which was manly in spite of fresh complexion and fair hair, round honest-looking blue eyes, and a frank straightforward manner, only marred occasionally in the presence of ladies, and especially in the presence of Emmy, by a little too much of shyness.

In his fear lest Emmy should re-enter the house without waiting for him, he came up so quickly that he was quite out of breath as he swung open the garden-gate.

"Miss Waters!" he cried, panting.

By this time, except for her cheeks, Emmy was as cool as could be desired.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites!" she said, with a careless elevation of the eyebrows as though she had only just become aware that such a person existed.

"I—I beg your pardon. But—but I thought that you might like to know—that you ought to know, that is— Since I saw you this morning I have been making inquiries, and I find it is quite true about old Mr. Waters. In fact, I took the liberty of calling at Dr. Plummer's on purpose, and they told me he must be in great danger, for Dr. Plummer had been over to see him again, and was there now. So as I thought perhaps your father didn't know, I came running all the way—"

"You are very kind," answered Emmy, with a little bow. "But papa was sent for some time ago, thank you."

"Oh!" said the young man, looking a little crestfallen to find that he had been of no use, after all.

"Yes," said Emmy, smoothing down a refractory fold in a dandy little apron that she wore. "What a windy day this is!"

"Yes, rather—very much so. I am afraid I am keeping you in the cold, Miss Waters."

"It is rather cold, certainly," acquiesced Emmy. "I suppose you don't want to see mamma?"

"N—no, thank you," said poor John, rather reluctantly, for in truth there was nothing he would have liked better than to be asked to enter. "I—I hope I have not kept you in the cold."

"Oh! don't mention it, Mr. Thwaites."

"Thank you. Then I will say good-bye, Miss Waters."

"Good-bye," said Emmy, looking very hard at some pigeons that were circling round the chimney-tops of the opposite houses—so hard that for a second or two she did not see the hand which the young man ventured timidly to extend. She saw it at last, and of course had to put out her hand too—what could she have done else?"

"Good-bye," he said, taking her hand. He looked at her for an instant, and then—apparently forgetting to let her hand go, for he still held it—added: "I suppose things will be very different when I see you next, Miss Emmy. Your father will be a rich man, and you will be a great lady."

"I don't know about that," answered Emmy, making a slight effort to liberate herself, which, however, the stupid creature did not seem so much as conscious of. "Some people think that perhaps Uncle Gilbert may forget us altogether, but of course I can't tell."

"Of course not, Miss Emmy. Well, I can only say I wish you every good fortune."

"Thank you," said Emmy, making another and more vigorous effort to get back her hand (for what could the people over the way be thinking?). It was, however, still held fast.

"But—but—I hope you won't be angry with me for saying so—if it should turn out different—it would be very selfish of me, of course—but—but if it did, I should be—in fact I should be glad rather than sorry. You know what I mean."

Having taken heart to say thus much, he took heart also to give her hand a great squeeze, and then, dismayed at his own audacity, turned away without waiting for an answer, and posted down the village street so rapidly that he almost seemed to be in flight.

Emmy got into the house and shut the door as quickly as she could. But she did not go immediately back to her mother, stopping a minute or two in the dark passage to arrange her apron and adjust her curls, and otherwise recover from the flutter into which the young man's affrontedness had thrown her.

"The idea!" she murmured poutingly to herself, as she recalled the atrocity of his parting words.

But even as she thought of them she found the pout relaxing into a smile in spite of herself. She could not help feeling that, after all, the loss of Uncle Gilbert's money might not be so very dreadful.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CLARE COURT COUSIN.

MEANWHILE Miss Egerton was making the best of her way home. As she went up the quaint little village street her progress was a good deal impeded by the necessity of returning the salutations which, as a great potentate of the neighborhood, she received from almost every one she met; but soon the houses began to be less and less thickly set, and her attention was gradually relieved from this strain. At last, having passed a few outlying cottages and farm-buildings, she found herself in a country road bordered only by leafless trees and hedges through which constant glimpses were to be had of the fields beyond, and accelerating her pace, she pushed briskly forward, with evident pleasure in the keen March wind that whistled about her, if not exactly in the dust with which it came accompanied. So much was she absorbed in enjoyment of her walk that she scarcely noticed a clatter of horse-hoofs which presently sounded behind her, and was quite startled on hearing a voice say:

"Why, Olivia!"

She turned her head, so much surprised that it was a moment before she recognized in the well-mounted rider who had just reined up at her side her cousin, the son and heir of the Egertons at Clare Court.

"Dear me! is that you? How do you do, Randal?"

"I was just coming over to see you," he said, bending from his horse to shake hands. "I am so glad not to have missed you. You will allow me the honor of escorting you home?"

"There is no occasion to trouble you or your horse to keep pace with me," said the young lady. "Ride on to my house; you will not have to wait long."

"Ah! but I intend to have the pleasure of walking with you," was the gallant reply. "Here, James," he continued, addressing a servant who just then rode up, "look after Viscount."

"Oh! pray do not trouble yourself; I can walk home by myself quite well."

"I would not lose such an opportunity for the world," answered the cavalier, and proceeded to dismount without allowing time for further remonstrance.

It will be seen from this meeting of the cousins that the family at Clare Court had been magnanimous enough to take their humble relative into favor since her promotion to Egerton Park, in spite of the disappointment which her heiressship had inflicted upon themselves. Very magnanimous such conduct surely was, for the Clare Court property was not only much smaller than the Egerton Park estate, but was said to be heavily mortgaged; so that, for people with a position in the county to keep up and a large family of daughters to portion off, the loss of such an inheritance as had fallen to their obscure cousin was no light misfortune. Indeed there were not wanting scandal-mongers who whispered that they could not have reconciled themselves to the calamity with so good a grace but for the hope of retrieving it by a match between the new mistress of Egerton Park and their son Randal—a suspicion confirmed by the assiduity of the young man's attentions to the heiress on all public occasions. How far the heiress was disposed to



encourage these attentions was another question, answered differently in different quarters. On the one hand, it was certain that Randal, with his tall military-looking figure, fine dark eyes, and black silken beard and mustache, had every thing to insure his success with any ordinary young lady whom he might set himself to fascinate, especially a young lady whom he had the advantage of being able to approach on terms of cousinly intimacy. But then, on the other hand, it was equally certain that Miss Egerton, if indeed he had any such view with regard to her, was not an ordinary young lady at all.

In another moment Randal had joined his cousin on the foot-path, while the servant trotted on with the two horses, to lead the way at a discreet distance in front.

"Pray take my arm, Olivia," was his first overture.

"You are very kind," said Olivia, "but really I think I can manage better by myself. How are Mr. and Mrs. Egerton?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Egerton!" echoed the young man petulantly. "Good heavens, Olivia! what a cold artificial way of speaking! Can't you call them uncle and aunt?"

"I am sure I beg your pardon; I am always forgetting. But you see it is so lately that I have had an opportunity of calling them any thing at all—it is only natural I should make mistakes sometimes."

Randal slightly colored and did not answer, so Olivia went on:

"And your sisters, I hope they are all quite well, and caught no cold at Mrs. Wrenthmore's ball? By-the-way, what a pleasant evening that was!"

"Very pleasant indeed." He paused as though for reflection; then drew a long sigh and added: "You seemed to enjoy it very much, at all events, with such a lot of fellows as there were dangling about you. I scarcely got near you all evening."

"Oh! Randal, how can you say so? I danced with you twice, and really I think that ought to satisfy you."

"Satisfy me!" he grumbled. "What! and you talking and laughing all evening with a pack of coxcombical toadies and fortune-hunters who can no more appreciate you—"

"Stop a minute, Randal. If you are kind enough to be afraid of my head being turned by the nonsense of those coxcombical toadies and fortune-hunters as you call them, I am much obliged to you, but you may set your mind entirely at rest. I am not taken in by a single one of all their compliments, and am perfectly aware that but for my money I am as plain and unattractive a person as ever set foot in a ball-room."

He started in scandalized horror.

"Plain! unattractive! you—Olivia! Ah! if you could only look into my heart, and see the impression— Why, you are all beauty and attractiveness together; you are all— Now, Olivia, what are you angry at?"

He saw her looking at him with cold eyes and curling lip, and wondered how he could possibly have offended her. The fact was, she was thinking how differently the same proposition which he had met with such extravagant contradiction had been received a while ago when made in the presence of real and disinterested friends.

"Angry! I am not angry in the least—how could I be angry with such a pretty speech? All beauty and attractiveness together—how delightful! and yet, made up of such commonplace materials as I am, it is rather strange too. Let me see, I must be something like my namesake in 'Twelfth Night,' I suppose, for I really think I possess all her perfections—item, two lips indifferent red; item, two eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin—dear me, how gratifying!"

Randal pulled his long whiskers with a puzzled air; he was not very deeply read, and had not the slightest idea what she was talking about.

"Well, so you might be gratified if you knew how people admire you—really and truly admire you, I mean. And, by Jove! it would be odd if they didn't, for wherever you go there isn't a girl fit to hold a candle to you, in looks or any thing else, of course."

"What! you really think so, Randal? Why, then those nice young men were not flattering after all—I must consider the matter seriously. Which should you say was the most eligible?—Colonel Crawford, or Captain Fane, or Mr. Neville, or Mr.—"

"Olivia, Olivia, do you want to drive me mad? A set of fawning wretches like those—do you think they can possibly care for any thing but your money; do you imagine—"

Olivia turned her face full upon him.

"Dear me! this is very odd. You tell me in one breath that I am all beauty and attractiveness, the loveliest creature in the room on all occasions; and in the next you say that it is utterly impossible for Colonel Crawford, or Captain Fane, or Mr. Neville, or Mr. anybody else to care for any thing about me but my money. What am I to believe?"

The young man bit his lip; he was wont rather to pique himself on his wit, but somehow with Olivia he always felt that he was made to look like a fool.

"Come now, Olivia, it isn't fair just because you are so clever—"

"Oh! it is to be clever instead of beautiful now, is it?"

"Clever and beautiful too, you know you are. The cleverest and most beautiful girl in the county, come."

"You do me great honor, Mr. Egerton."

"Mr. Egerton! There you go again! So cold and unkind as it sounds. I'm sure I always call you by your Christian name."

"I can't deny that," said Olivia.

"Well, it's only right between relations, isn't it? I declare I think sometimes you forget all about our being cousins."

"I am always quite ready to treat you as a cousin," she answered, but there was a slight emphasis on the last word which seemed as though she wished to limit the construction that he might place on the admission.

"But never as any thing else, you mean?" he said bitterly.

"That is what I meant, certainly."

"Olivia, this is cruel. If you knew with what emotions I sought you to-day, with what a full heart—"

"Now pray, Randal, don't begin with that again."

"What! you won't even listen! I have come

all these miles on purpose to declare my feelings, and you stop me before I begin to speak."

"What is the use of your speaking when we both know the answer beforehand?"

"But you might at least hear me; you might give me a chance—"

"There is no chance whatever—absolutely none."

"None!" He walked moodily on for a second or two, then, switching with his riding-whip at the twigs of the hedgerow, resumed with a profoundly melancholy air:

"At least you will let me hope that some day I may find your heart less—"

"You need not hope for any thing that has to do with my heart. Old maids have no hearts, and if ever there was a confirmed old maid in the world I am one."

"Pish, Olivia! To talk like that, with your beauty and accomplishments—"

"Randal, as a favor I beg that this subject may be dropped."

She spoke so seriously that he was afraid to persevere further for the present, and merely drew another long sigh.

They had now reached a curiously carved old stone archway which was one of the approaches to Egerton Park, and Olivia stopped to undo the gate. But Randal did not seem inclined to enter, and held out his hand to say good-bye.

"What! won't you come in?" said Olivia.

"I can not," he answered gloomily. "You will not let me speak of what I came to speak about, and I am not capable at present of talking of any thing else."

"Well, whenever you do find yourself capable of talking of something else, I can only say that you will always find a welcome."

"Some other time," he murmured, "when I am calmer and stronger—"

"At that other time I shall be most happy to see you. So now good-bye."

"Good-bye," answered Randal in low sad accents, and beckoned to his servant, who had stationed himself with the horses at a little distance from the gate. In a minute more the rejected suitor was again in the saddle, riding disconsolately back in the direction of Clare Court, and thinking:

"Was there ever such obstinacy? What would she have—a title, I suppose, but I fancy she'll find herself out there; rich lords don't let themselves go cheap, and I think she is too long-headed to take a bankrupt one. Did I make any mistake, I wonder—I tried to lay it on thick enough, goodness knows, but some women are so fond of praise— Well, I have failed again, but I will succeed some day—I am more determined than ever. Confound it, there's something about her so uncommonly—not that she's exactly pretty, of course, but there's a sort of piquancy and flavor about her—and then, considering how exactly the property would suit— Provoking creature! But I'll bring her to book yet, see if I don't."

He might have been less sanguine of success if he could have seen the smile, half of contempt, half of bitterness, with which Olivia looked after him as he rode away—a smile which still played about her lips as she walked up the avenue to the house, and which had not quite faded even when she found herself in her own chamber.

"All beauty and attractiveness together. How they all sing to the same tune, and what a fool they must take me for!"

She cast her eyes disdainfully towards her mirror, but somehow did not so disdainfully withdraw them, and indeed for a little while did not withdraw them at all. For to her surprise the face she found there, all flushed with fresh air and excitement, was one which unaccountably struck her for the first moment as almost beautiful.

But she had long ago settled in her own mind that she was not and could not be a beauty, and presently turned away with a shake of the head and something that sounded like a sigh.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WAITING FOR THE END.

A LARGE chamber of handsome dimensions, but made dreary-looking by dingy dark-colored paper, gaunt dusty hangings, and above all by a spectral four-post bedstead which constituted its principal piece of furniture—doubly dreary-looking just now in the gray light of the bleak March sky that showed dimly through the drawn blinds—such was the room into which Austin Waters on arriving at his uncle's house found himself ushered.

He was in a state of excited bewilderment which made him feel almost as one in a dream, but through the confusion of his senses he perceived on entering two persons in the room both of whom he ought to know. One of these, sitting at the foot of the bed making entries in a note-book, was a large heavy-looking man of solemn countenance and demeanor, who was familiar to him as Dr. Plummer, the chief physician of the neighborhood; the other, just then in the act of giving an adjusting touch to the pillows, was a fat red-faced old woman, whom he recognized as Mrs. Muggridge, the last new housekeeper. He was also aware of something that lay beneath the bed-clothes, shaping them into a long narrow heap not unlike a mound in a church-yard, and knew that he stood in the presence of Uncle Gilbert.

He made a few wavering steps towards the bed, and presently found somebody shaking his hand. It was Dr. Plummer, who had politely risen to receive him.

"A most melancholy occasion, Mr. Austin," said the doctor in a low oily whisper. "Ah! I am afraid it must be very near the last."

Austin Waters looked at the motionless heap before him—motionless save for an occasional slight twitching movement—but could make no response.

"Ah! very sad," commented the doctor.

"Poor dear!" sighed Mrs. Muggridge, not because she was particularly fond of a master in whose service she was comparatively a stranger, but because she felt that something was demanded of her by the proprieties of the occasion.

Austin began to feel that something was demanded of him too, and, making a great effort, stammered out:

"Is—there no hope?"

His voice sounded so strange to him that he could hardly recognize it as his own. But apparently there were other ears that did recognize

it, for no sooner had he spoken than something stirred among the bed-clothes, and another voice (so thick and husky it was!) said:

"Austin!"

He had so little expected to be thus accosted that he shook from head to foot, and could hardly control himself sufficiently to answer:

"Yes, Uncle Gilbert."

"Come here," said the thick husky voice, and a face was raised from the pillow—a yellow, furrowed, distorted face ghastly to see, and more ghastly still because to the distortion of paralysis there now seemed to be added the distortion of an attempted smile. For a minute Austin found a pair of bleared half-glazed eyes staring at him, then heard the same voice say, issuing laboriously from dry slow-moving lips: "Long-looked-for comes at last, you see."

Austin could not at once reply, and the dry lips had time to articulate:

"What's the matter? Are you ill too?"

He felt that it was necessary to answer, and compelled himself to falter forth humbly:

"I am so sorry, uncle, so anxious—"

He was interrupted by a gasping guttural sound which he presently saw was intended for a chuckle.

"Anxious about the will, eh? Oh! I've not forgotten it."

The words were accompanied with what seemed to Austin so demoniacal a grin that he remained silent perforce.

"It is there—the cabinet in the corner—" went on the old man, speaking with increased difficulty and pointing with a lean, shrivelled hand in which a little life was still left. "Top drawer—key under pillow—just here—Aha! wouldn't you like to look—wouldn't you like to know—"

He broke off with the same dismal chuckle as before, apparently too much exhausted to say more.

A damp dew had gathered on Austin's forehead, and his eyes wandered nervously round the room, first resting vacantly on the cabinet in the corner, then straying back to the sick man's pillow. Presently, finding his uncle's face still turned towards him, he started, and murmured feebly:

"How can you think I care—at such a time as this—"

But even as he spoke he saw the withered eyelids slowly droop until at last they altogether closed. The sudden flicker had subsided, and the old man relapsed into his former state, giving no sign of life save an occasional tremor of the limbs and now and then a faint catching of the breath. Dr. Plummer came forward with soft, solemn step, and, putting out his plump white hand towards the thin yellow one that lay extended on the bed-clothes, pressed his fingers on the wrinkled wrist.

"A comatose condition which can only terminate in dissolution," he whispered authoritatively. "The end may be expected from one minute to another."

Having delivered this dictum, the doctor stole noiselessly back to his seat, and equally noiselessly Mrs. Muggridge subsided into the comfortable chair she had provided for herself behind the curtain at the farther side of the bed. For two or three minutes more Austin stood gazing

dreamily around—at the closed eyes that had so lately looked on him, at the cabinet in the corner, at the white pillow that swelled upward round the dying man's head. At last, seeing the doctor once more apply himself to his note-book, he was reminded that he might be kept standing there for some time, and, with another mechanical look round, he too sat down to wait.

To wait! What for? Stunned and mazed as were his senses, he could not help asking himself this question as the idea of waiting occurred to him; and he could not help answering it with a horrible particularity of detail that made him tremble. He was waiting for the cessation of those occasional slight tremors of the limbs and those faint catchings of the breath, for the final subsidence of the slow pulse beating under that wrinkled wrist which he could still see from his place by the bedside (the face was hidden by the half-drawn curtain), for the transmutation into lifeless clay of yonder human heap that lay beneath the bed-clothes—sluggish and inert, and yet, while it retained the name of man, an insuperable barrier between him and the top drawer of the cabinet in the corner.

He shut his eyes in horror at his own thoughts. What! to be impatient of the poor remnant of life even now ebbing out of those frozen veins, to feel angry with the poor departing spirit for its lingering—angry now—now that it really was departing! He tried to think of other things, and, when he found he could not, tried not to think at all, tried to count the tickings of the clock on the chimney-piece.

One, two, three, four—How slow those tickings came, as though the clock itself were tired—worn out with waiting! Tick, tick, tick, tick—wait, wait, wait, wait. Ah! what a frightful thing it was to wait—worse even than to die! The dying knew nothing, felt nothing; were in a state of suspended consciousness both as regards this world and the next, whereas the waiting—Strange to think of, that those who were thus in themselves nonentities, dead to this state of existence and not yet awakened to another, should nevertheless have this grim power of arresting the action of the living, of holding all the business of life in abeyance, of keeping keys under their pillows—

He shuddered. The demon of impatience had come upon him again, and again he must strive to cast it forth. Tick, tick, tick, tick—but that monotonous sound only made him more impatient still. He tried harder than ever to think of something else, but the thoughts that presented themselves had a hideous fantastic incongruity about them that made him shudder anew. It came into his head, for instance, how he had once read of some great man's mother who, being occupied as Uncle Gilbert was occupied now, had sent down word to a friend who called to see her that she was particularly engaged in dying. Engaged in dying—what an idea—as though it were some business which required time and attention to execute. Well, and so it did require time—he might see that for himself—a long time. And then he fell to wondering if the old lady who had spoken of death so lightly had kept any body waiting as he was being kept waiting now, if in her room there had been a cabinet, if under her pillow there had been a key, if—

Impatient again! How horrible it was—so

horrible that, finding he absolutely could not keep impatience off, he began trying to think if he had any excuse for feeling it. Ah! surely if any one in this world had any excuse for impatience under such circumstances, that one was himself. How long and wearily he had waited, what years and years of slow crushing anguish he had suffered—and all by means of the old man whose last drags of life were even now oozing out so tardily. Ah! how he had suffered! what torture that old man had put him to—that dreaded, hated, abhorred old man! A vision of the past rose before him—his happy Liverpool home, his three pretty little children, his wife's smiling face; and then other memories came crowding after these—the squalid gentility of his life under Uncle Gilbert's eyes, the tedium of enforced idleness, his wife's tears and pallid cheeks, his own patient endurance of taunts and insults that at one time it would have set his blood boiling to think of, three tiny coffins borne one after the other across the threshold of that ill-omened rent-free house—ay, and other memories still, which as they presented themselves made him almost groan aloud in agony.

Oh! the wreck, the waste that his life had been—would be, at least, if there should be disappointment now. Disappointment! He felt his tongue grow dry within his mouth as he thought of it, as he asked himself in despair how he should bear it. But he could not bear it, he would not. If disappointment came, he would simply walk to the nearest pool deep enough for a man to lie down in— His poor wife and daughter would miss him for a time, but he could not help that—not even for their sakes could he endure his life longer if disappointment was in store.

Yes, but then disappointment was not in store—he was sure of it, he knew it, and why should he harass himself? In the top drawer of yonder cabinet lay that which was to repair the ruin of his life, which was to make up to him all, and more than all, that he had suffered. Oh! if only he could get one look, if only the time would come when he might put his hand under that pillow— But as he reached this point he found his heart beating so fast and his whole blood in such a fever of excitement, that he was obliged to break off in sheer apprehension lest he should somehow commit himself in the presence of the doctor and the housekeeper. He must be patient—he must wait a little longer.

Tick, tick, tick, tick. He would not think more, but sat listening to the clock, to the occasional rustle of the housekeeper's dress as she made an involuntary change of position, to the faint scratching of the doctor's pencil as it travelled over the lines of the note-book—a dreary concert of slight sounds only varied from time to time by a yet slighter sound that now and then would come from the bed. As he listened to it all, he thought the monotony would turn his brain. But how could he escape?

At last the scratching of the pencil ceased. The doctor, having apparently written all that he had to write, put the note-book back into his pocket. Then he raised his eyes and took a long look in the direction of the patient still lying between life and death, then he twiddled with his gold chain, then he took out his pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose in dumb show, and

lastly he drew forth his watch. Was it possible that he was beginning to get impatient too?

Just as Austin was thinking thus, his eyes and the doctor's met. The latter immediately rose, and, coming towards him on tiptoe, whispered:

"It may be some time still before a change supervenes. What do you say to going down stairs for a little? Mrs. Muggridge will call us if any thing happens. Or would you prefer—"

"Thank you, I would much rather wait in the parlor," said Austin hastily.

Wait! What an awkwardly chosen expression! But it had slipped from him unawares.

The doctor staid a moment to whisper a few words of routine instruction to Mrs. Muggridge, then rejoined Austin, and they left the room together. Ah! what an emancipation it was to breathe the fresh air of the staircase, to be out of earshot of that horrible clock!

They went down stairs to the parlor—a large and lofty, though, by reason of the meagreness of its furniture, a somewhat bare and cold-looking room. But no sooner had Austin entered it than he felt that the task of waiting here would be no less oppressive than the task of waiting up stairs had been. The restraint of a stranger's presence was intolerable—perhaps more intolerable, now that he was at liberty to speak and move at discretion, than in the chamber of death itself. He felt so utterly helpless as to what he ought to say or do.

"A wonderful constitution," remarked the doctor, gently letting himself drop into an arm-chair. "Really I don't know when I have met with another such in the whole course of my professional experience."

"Oh! very," said Austin, looking abstractedly out of the window, whither he had loitered because he felt that by standing he would better preserve his freedom of action than by sitting down. But he had hardly begun to look when he bethought himself what passers-by might say if they saw him standing at the window on such a day as this, and he came away to plant himself before an old-fashioned engraving of the "Death of Charles the Fifth."

"Let me see, eighty-six last birth-day, I think," went on the doctor pensively. "Ah! a very advanced age, to be sure!"

"Yes," said Austin, wincing.

As if he did not know that already! What did the man mean by bothering him? And then he fell to wondering if there was any body waiting down stairs when Charles the Fifth lay dying, and, if so, how they managed to pass the time.

There was another pause, again broken by the doctor, who, sitting opposite the window, commanded a view of the garden and path leading up to the house.

"Dear me, here is Mr. Podmore. Coming to inquire, I suppose."

A subdued ring made itself heard, and Austin, to whom any distraction was welcome, looked eagerly towards the door. There was a low-voiced parley in the hall, and immediately afterwards Mr. Podmore was shown in.

Mr. Podmore was a person of some importance in Chorcombe, being neither more nor less than the principal lawyer of the place. He was a short stoutish man with a large nose, upright-standing hair, a well developed bump of self-es-

teem, and an impressively dignified countenance, made more dignified still by a white neckcloth, spotless as his own reputation, which he wore on all occasions. But, awe-inspiring as Mr. Podmore looked, his character was not altogether without the softer social attributes. He was always of course dignified, as befitted one high in the confidence of all the best families of the neighborhood, but in the company of those whom he considered to be of his own set he could come out as a good fellow and bon-vivant, and even, with reverence be it spoken, as something of a gossip.

He shook hands cordially with his friend the doctor—cordially, yet with a certain decorous hush about his manner which was his mode of paying tribute to the grim visitor whose shadow even then rested on the house.

"Ah! Plummer, how do you do? I just stopped at the door to inquire, and when I heard you were here I thought I would look in on you for a minute. And so things are quite at the last, they tell me?"

"Quite," said the doctor. "It may take place now at any moment."

Here Austin Waters, still standing before the picture, made a slight movement which drew towards him the attention of the new-comer, who advanced to greet him very politely—more politely perhaps than he had ever done before.

"Ah! Mr. Austin, I beg your pardon. You are pretty well, I hope?"

"Pretty well," said Austin hoarsely.

"Oh yes! to be sure—very trying occasion of course. Well, well, it is a debt we must all pay."

Austin did not answer; he was thinking of the top drawer of the cabinet, and for the instant could think of nothing else.

"And then he is an old man and has had a long life, you must remember," went on the lawyer in his most consoling tones.

"Oh yes! certainly," assented Austin.

"Enjoying all his faculties, too, up to the very last. And what a thing that is to be thankful for, especially where there is property to be disposed of."

The blood rushed to Austin's face; it had just occurred to him that perhaps Mr. Podmore, who had been for many years occasionally employed as his uncle's lawyer, might already possess the knowledge he so thirsted for.

"But I suppose all that has been settled years ago," continued Mr. Podmore, looking at him a little inquisitively. "He was too good a man of business to leave such a thing to the last."

"Do—do you not know, then?" stammered Austin.

Mr. Podmore shook his head.

"I? Oh no! it was a subject he never so much as mentioned. It is a fancy with some people to make a mystery about such things, you know."

Austin said nothing, but merely set himself to look at the picture harder than ever—so hard that at last he could almost imagine himself projected into the death-chamber which it represented. The artist had depicted a piece of furniture opposite the bed that recalled the cabinet up stairs, and it seemed as though he could never have done gazing at it and speculating on what it might contain.

Mr. Podmore glanced at him with some ap-

pearance of curiosity, then, seeing that he was not inclined for further conversation, turned once more to his friend the doctor, and the pair sat down.

There was silence between them for a little while—another tribute to the presence of the grim visitor up stairs—but at last one of the two made a low-toned remark to the effect that it was a cold day, and the other said yes it was, and after that they got on swimmingly. One or two whispered questions and answers were first exchanged as to the nature of the case in the room above, then something was said as to the amount of illness in the village generally, then the weather was once more touched upon, and finally the conversation wandered off to such irrelevant topics as the state of the funds and the prospects of the session. But Austin hardly heard a word, and what he did hear had no meaning for him.

He came away from the picture at last, afraid that the others might guess what it was that interested him in it, and took to walking up and down—as softly as possible, so that the creaking of his footsteps might not drown any other sound. For all this time he was intently listening—listening for some sign from up stairs.

Presently he stopped, listening more intently than ever, and his heart gave a bound.

He thought he had heard something like a door opening up stairs. And after a few seconds more of such listening his heart gave another bound. He distinctly heard a foot on the upper landing.

The foot began to descend the stairs; he could hear it each time that it was set down—hear it in spite of the chattering of the two men beside him. At last he heard it reach the bottom of the staircase—advance along the hall—pause outside the parlor-door—ah! how his heart beat! And yet even then the two men took no notice.

The door opened, and Mrs. Muggridge appeared, her red face not quite so red as usual.

"Oh! sir, if you please—" she began, looking at the doctor, then paused and dropped a courtesy.

The doctor looked round, fairly roused at last.

"Well?" he asked with grave attention.

"If you please, sir, I thought just now as how master seemed to be lying very quiet like, and I went up to look at him close, and if you please, sir—"

She dropped another courtesy, and every body in the room knew what had happened. Every body—even Austin, though from his dull fixed gaze and statue-like immobility he might have been deemed incapable of understanding any thing.

There was a minute's silence during which the falling of a pin might have been heard, and then the doctor said:

"I am going up stairs. Would you like to come too?"

He moved forward, and Mr. Podmore followed, the latter, however, making way as he drew near the door for Austin to precede him. Austin saw that he was expected to accompany them, and went. But his whole faculties were for the time benumbed—so benumbed that he had ceased to think even of the cabinet-drawer.

They entered the gray sombre room up stairs—more gray and sombre than ever now, for the

day was beginning to wane—and stood by the side of that spectral four-post bed, looking at what lay there.

"Yes, it is quite over," whispered the doctor, bending forward to touch the wrinkled hand that Austin had sat watching a while ago.

"It seems to have been very peaceful," murmured the lawyer.

"As quiet as a lamb," softly put in Mrs. Muggridge.

Austin did not speak—only stood with his eyes riveted on the withered, pinched, dead face that lay upon the pillow, as intently as though his gaze sought to penetrate beyond the face and the pillow too. And indeed as he looked he did begin to think of something on the other side of that face and the other side of that pillow. He began to think of the key of the cabinet-drawer.

He began to think of it, and when he had once begun he could not keep himself from going on, until presently he was able to think of nothing else, until he had almost forgotten the dead face which lay before him on the pillow, and only remembered what was underneath. Ah! that key, that key—if he might only feel his fingers close on it, if he might only fit it into the lock of yonder drawer! If only he might! But how was he to get it from that dead guardianship with others looking on? He knew that they had no right to say him nay, but, for all that, he dared not let them see what things were in his mind. He must be patient yet a little while—patient though those throbbing pulses of his should burst with longing. And so, tutoring himself to patience, he stood, looking at the dead face, but thinking of the key of the cabinet-drawer. Oh! when, when?

The others stood and looked too, keeping a solemn silence, which pressed on Austin's heart like a weight of lead. At last the voice of the doctor was heard saying in subdued tones:

"Well, you will see that every thing is properly arranged, Mrs. Muggridge."

"Yes sir. And if you would have no objection, sir, to let me call in Mrs. Thompson to help—a nice respectable woman with four children, as clean and civil-spoken—"

"I dare say it would be a very good plan," said the doctor. "But any thing of that kind you had better mention to Mr. Austin; he is the person you have to look to now, you know."

Austin heard, and a sudden flush rose to his cheeks. He thought he saw how he might get at the key without further delay.

"I can say nothing about that," he answered, raising his eyes. "And of course nobody can say any thing until we have seen what is in the—the—"

He paused and glanced at the lawyer, who supplied the word immediately.

"The will? Ah! to be sure. Yes, we must be beginning to think about the will soon."

"It is in that cabinet—the top drawer," said Austin quickly. "And the key is under the pillow; he told me himself. Shall—shall—"

He looked at the lawyer imploringly.

"I think we may as well," said Mr. Podmore, answering the look. "It is desirable to know as soon as possible if any instructions are left for our immediate guidance."

Austin put his hand towards the bed-head, and, turning once more to Mr. Podmore to

make sure that he had really obtained sanction for what he was about to do, slid it gently under the pillow. For an instant he shuddered as he felt on his hand the weight of the dead man's head, but in the next his fingers had come in contact with a bunch of keys, and he shuddered no more.

He drew the keys forth, and, almost blinded though he was with agitation, immediately singled out one he knew to be that which he wanted, then, nearly tottering as he went, crossed the room to the cabinet. Somehow he managed to put the key into the lock of the top drawer, and in another second the drawer was open.

A single packet lay there—a packet on the covering of which were inscribed in the old man's largest and clearest hand the words, "Last Will and Testament of Gilbert Waters." The expectant heir clutched at the document, then, with another look towards the lawyer, laid his fingers on the seal.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Podmore, with a glance at the bed. "Had we not better go down stairs?"

Austin dared not disobey the suggestion, and moved towards the door without a word. Presently, having, he knew not how, made his way down stairs, he found himself again in the parlor, with the lawyer and doctor beside him, and in his hand the packet out of the cabinet drawer. He laid his fingers once more on the seal, and this time Mr. Podmore gave him a sign of encouragement.

But his fingers trembled so that he could do nothing. The lawyer came to his assistance.

"Shall I open it, Mr. Austin? Such things are more in my way than yours, perhaps."

Austin nodded. Mr. Podmore took the packet from his unresisting hands, broke the seal, and drew from the envelope a paper which he straightway began to unfold.

What a rustling that paper made! and what a time the man was in opening it, and smoothing it out, and getting it under his eye-glass! Would he never have done?

At last all preliminaries were completed; the will—Uncle Gilbert's will—was spread open on the table, and Mr. Podmore had got his eye-glass fairly to bear on it.

"Ha—hum—let me see—yes, all in proper form—duly signed and attested—ah! done at Bristol—twenty-one years ago. Ah—hum—hum—I, Gilbert Waters—sound mind—and so on—hum—hum—ah! here we are—give and bequeath—hum—hum—My dear Mr. Waters" (here the lawyer looked up with something of surprise in his manner), "allow me to offer you my very best congratulations. You are your uncle's sole heir and legatee."

Austin's pale lips moved slightly, but no sound came from them.

"Yes, there is no mistake about it—all estate and effects, real and personal, whatsoever and wheresoever, and so on—nephew Austin Waters and heirs forever—all as clear as crystal. And dear me, Mr. Waters, I must congratulate you again—here is a memorandum in your uncle's handwriting dated last week and addressed to you as his heir, by which I see that the property is even larger than—"

But Austin Waters heard no more. With a faint cry he had fallen on the floor at the lawyer's feet.

## CHAPTER V.

## NEW-BORN HONORS.

If a stranger had happened to be passing through Chorcombe next morning, he might have noticed with some curiosity a certain house in a certain street which seemed to be attracting to itself all the attention of idlers and passers by. Every body who went by gave it a glance, sometimes even stopping to stare up at the windows; and yet the house was only a plain, rather shabby, one-storied cottage exactly like the others on each side, while the windows, protected by closely drawn blinds, defied the most attentive scrutiny. If the hypothetical stranger, noticing all these things, had been sufficiently inquisitive to ask what was remarkable about this dwelling, apparently only distinguished from its neighbors by greater silence and more decorous avoidance of publicity, he would have been told that the owner had just succeeded by the death of a relative to a fortune of two hundred thousand pounds.

For so indeed it was. The owner of the house was Austin Waters, and Austin Waters was old Gilbert's sole heir and legatee, with no possible hitch or flaw in his legateship. There was no ambiguity discovered or discoverable in the wording of the will, no disappointed claimant raising doubts as to the testator's sanity, no inconvenient codicil turning up in a hayloft, or bed-tester, or secret drawer, or, for that matter, in existence. Uncle Gilbert had taken pleasure in tormenting his nephew with doubts of his good faith, had so tormented him cruelly and pitilessly, but he had never really meditated such treachery as would have been involved in the violation of his promise. And now the promise was fulfilled, gloriously, superabundantly fulfilled, and Austin's humble dwelling, with its drawn blinds and hushed exterior, was marked out as that of the richest man in Chorcombe.

Inside the house every thing was in an unquiet, unsettled state strangely at variance with the demurely tranquil aspect which it presented to the external world. Nothing was in its right place that morning, nothing was done at its right time. There was a tumult and confusion, a hurrying up and down stairs, a jumble of irrelevant question and answer—a general commotion through the household which looked as though for its members the whole world had been turned upside down. And indeed this was not very far from being the case.

In the little parlor where he had yesterday been discussing the chances of wealth or ruin, Austin Waters sat at his desk, pen in hand. He had soon regained consciousness after his fainting-fit, and, having duly taken a sleeping-draught prescribed for him on the previous evening, had this morning received an early visit from Dr. Plummer (the first that the doctor had paid that day), and was pronounced to be surmounting the immediate shock of his bereavement very satisfactorily. But, Dr. Plummer's sleeping-draught notwithstanding, he had scarcely closed his eyes all night through.

It has been said that he was at his desk; but though he had been at his desk all morning, he had as yet hardly begun the first of the notes of intimation which he had sat down to write. His thoughts were wandering so that in any case he would have found it next to impossible to concen-

trate them, and, as it happened, he was being perpetually distracted by external interruptions. First it was the doctor, who had so kindly given him precedence of all other patients; then it was the Rev. Mr. Elkins, the parish clergyman, who called with the most friendly condolences and offers of service on behalf of Mrs. Elkins and himself; then it was a succession of polite inquirers at the street door, varied by the delivery of some half-dozen circulars from different tradesmen in the neighborhood who in the most obliging way imaginable offered their goods for inspection, especially drawing attention to the quality of their mournings. Nor was this all; there was Mrs. Waters, who, her face unwontedly flushed, but her manner almost as quiet as ever, sat sewing beside her husband in the parlor; and there was Emmy, incessantly tripping in and out of the room about something or other, and apparently under physical incapacity to be still for two minutes together. Poor Emmy! she tried hard to show, she even tried hard to feel, some touch of seemingly regret for the sad event which had raised the family to sudden greatness, but she did not the least in the world succeed. It was such a delicious new experience, this of being rich, and she was so happy in it! As for the feeling which had crossed her for a moment yesterday, that Uncle Gilbert's money might perhaps be a matter of comparative indifference, she was separated from the state of mind which made it possible by what seemed to be a gulf of ages.

"I wonder Madame Lebrun isn't here," said Emmy, as for the fiftieth time at least that morning she came fluttering into the parlor. "I think she ought to have been by this time, don't you, mamma? She might know that people are always in a hurry about mournings."

Madame Lebrun (name supposed originally to have been Brown) was the fashionable dressmaker of Chorcombe, and Emmy had never yet worn a dress made by other hands than her mother's or her own.

"She will come soon, my dear, no doubt. Had you not better sit down and wait patiently? I am afraid we are disturbing your papa sadly."

"Not at all, not at all," said Austin, looking up and pushing away his papers as though glad of the respite. "There is plenty of time before the post goes, and even if there were not—Let me see, what were you saying? Madame Lebrun, the dressmaker—you are sure she is a first-rate one, eh? Mind, you are to have every thing first-rate now."

"Oh! but she is quite first-rate, papa, I assure you; indeed I have heard people say she makes as well as the London ones, almost. If you only saw the dress she sent home last week to Miss Egerton—a splendid pink satin at ten shillings a yard—only fancy!"

"Ten shillings a yard, was it? Then look here, child, tell the woman to make you another pink satin exactly like it—at twenty shillings a yard if she likes—there!"

"You dear papa! But that wouldn't do with the mourning, you know."

"The mourning, ah yes! I forgot the mourning. But you are to be dressed like ladies, mind—the best of every thing. What are the handsomest stuffs that can be worn in mourning? tell me."

"Oh! I don't know, papa, there are so many

things. Moire antique and velvet—these would be more suitable for mamma, perhaps—and then there's silk—"

"Moire antique and velvet. Agnes, remember—never any thing commoner."

Mrs. Waters looked up at her husband with a smile, a smile almost as bright as her smiles used to be of old—such is the healing power of wealth even on those who are least its worshippers. "Never any thing commoner! But, my dear, how do you think I am to get comfortably through the work of the day—"

"Work of the day! you are to do no more work. You have always been a lady—the best in the county—and now you are going to live like one. I wish you would put down that sewing—what is the good of it all now?"

"But it is a pleasure to me, Austin—really it is. I should not like to be sitting idle."

"Oh! well, if you actually prefer to be always slaving—"

"Oh! we shall soon get mamma out of all that," put in Emmy apologetically. "But seriously, it would be a good plan to make up our minds what we want before Madame Lebrun comes. And really I think that for mamma a moire antique and a velvet, and perhaps a silk for morning wear—"

"Very well, and tell the woman to make you two of each kind while she is about it."

"Two of each kind, Austin?" said Mrs. Waters, with another bright smile. "I should be puzzled to find house-room for them, I am afraid."

"Very likely you would here, but what do you say to Chorcombe Lodge, pray?" (Chorcombe Lodge was the name of Uncle Gilbert's house.) "Room enough to keep a few dresses there, I fancy. And if you think I'm going to stop a day longer than I can help in a beastly hole like this while we have got a splendid house waiting to receive us— Ah! Agnes, my own Agnes, you shall see, you shall see; we have gone through a great deal, but all will be made up now."

Mrs. Waters did not answer (perhaps she remembered better than her husband what it was that had to be made up), but Emmy laid her white hand on her father's shoulder, and echoed:

"Oh yes, papa; all made up now."

"Yes, my darling, and made up to you too."

He laid his arm round her waist, and looked fondly up in her radiant face. "You are an heiress now, Emmy, as good an heiress as any in England, and we shall let them all see that you are, shan't we? Take you up to London, and show you off in Belgravia; what do you say to that?"

"To London! Oh, papa!" exclaimed Emmy, her breath almost taken away by so magnificent a prospect.

"Yes, and make you the belle of the season; how will you like it? All the fashionable young gentlemen sighing at your feet, and perhaps a lord or two among them, who knows?"

"Oh, papa! what nonsense you do talk!" was Emmy's remonstrance, but she gave a little side-glance at the picture in the dark corner even while she uttered it.

Here there was a tap at the door, which presently opened to disclose the somewhat untidy head of the charwoman who had been hired to help on this occasion of extra work and confusion.

"Here's madam, if you please, mum."

"Show her up stairs to my bedroom," answered Emmy, "we shall be there directly. I must go now, papa dear; we can't keep Madame Lebrun waiting. Mamma, will you come too? Do make haste."

And with these words she tripped lightly out of the room and up stairs. Ah! how happy she was—how exquisitely happy! it was more delightful to be rich even than she had imagined. And only to think of that John Thwaites as good as saying he wished her to be poor all her life! How cruel, how selfish!

Mrs. Waters put aside her work, and prepared to leave the room, rather slowly and lingeringly however, and looking all the time intently at her husband, who had once more drawn his papers towards him. Before she had reached the door she paused, and, coming back close to where he sat, said softly:

"Austin, now you will be able to pay—"

She sunk her voice so low that the next word was inaudible, and yet, inaudible though it was, she accompanied it with a half-frightened glance round the room as if to make sure that she was not overheard.

He evidently knew what she meant, and answered promptly:

"Pay him—I should think I will—pay him twice over—yes, and ten thousand pounds besides by way of interest."

She shook her head gently.

"I am sure he will take nothing more than what he has lent, but I should like him to have that. You will send it soon, won't you?"

"Of course I will—am I not just as anxious about it as you are? But it is no good sending it until we know whether there is any chance of his coming over, as he talked of in his last letter."

"I wish you would see about it, dear Austin. There must surely be another letter waiting for us by this time, and I am so longing to know—it would be such a pleasure—"

"Oh, yes! and so it would be a pleasure to me, of course. I'll tell you what, I'll take the train over to Bristol one day this week; I need not grudge the fare now, or a cab to the post-office either. I am sure you must know that I am quite as much interested in it as you can be."

"Thank you, dear," she might have said more, but just then a double knock sounded at the street-door, and she hurried to make her escape up stairs before the visitor, whoever he was, should have been admitted.

She had not been a moment gone when, with a profusion of polite bows, there entered a smug well-fed personage—at present somewhat solemnly got up in an irreproachable suit of black, and with all the smirks carefully smoothed out of a face naturally rather jovial than otherwise. This was Mr. Jupp, by calling house-agent and auctioneer, but also willing to be employed as undertaker in the case of any genteel funeral that might take place in the neighborhood.

It was in his capacity of undertaker that he had called this morning, and he had done his best to assume his most decorous undertaker's manner.

"I hope I see you well, sir," he began in carefully modulated tones while he softly glided into the room—"as well at least as circum-



stances permit. Ah! most melancholy—very much so indeed.”

“Oh! certainly,” assented the mourner, a little awkwardly perhaps, for he was rather taken aback by this way of looking at things.

“I have to apologize for intruding at such a time, but business, you know— I understand from Dr. Plummer that you think of employing me on the present occasion, sir?”

“Yes, he was mentioning your name this morning, and—”

“Ah yes! he is always kind enough to recommend me at these times. A most superior person is Dr. Plummer, and I am quite aware how much I have to think him for. So I have taken the liberty of just calling to ask on what principles you would wish the ceremony conducted, sir. I presume on the largest scale—”

“Oh! on the largest scale by all means.”

“Just so, sir, with all appropriate adjuncts. Oh! I was quite sure it would be your wish to show every respect possible. Well, he occupied a great position in the county, sir.”

“Very,” said Austin rather dreamily.

“And his successor occupies a great position after him, sir. Ah! Mr. Waters, I don’t know whether you will regard it as a liberty, but if you would allow me to offer my humble congratulations— Such a pleasure as the news has been to me, sir—to me and every body else in the place, I may say.” Here Mr. Jupp relapsed so far into his ordinary house-agent’s manner as actually to begin rubbing his hands, but, quickly recollecting the nature of his present business, he checked himself, and added solemnly: “And what day, sir, would you wish to fix for the obsequies?”

“I—I should like it to be as soon as possible,” said Austin, looking at the undertaker rather wistfully.

“Shall we say this day week, Mr. Waters? We can hardly make it earlier for an affair of any importance.”

Austin’s countenance fell.

“Oh! very well, this day week if you wish it. I only thought that the sooner it was got over—that is—but of course I wish to pay all the respect in my power. And—how soon afterwards do you think it would be considered usual for us to move into the house—after the—the funeral, I mean? This is such a very inconvenient little place, you see—”

“Oh! certainly you must get out of it as soon as possible. But as for moving directly to Chorcombe Lodge, I can hardly say if— The lawyers always make so many delays about proving the will and that kind of thing, don’t they? And then you wouldn’t wish to go in until it has been properly done up and decorated, of course.”

“What! do you mean to tell me I have got to stop in this hole till—”

“Stop here! Oh! dear no, not a day longer than you like. For that matter, I myself could name two or three highly eligible temporary residences in the neighborhood that would suit you to a hair—replete with every convenience for a nobleman’s or gentleman’s establishment. And you know it is absolutely necessary that something very considerable should be done to Chorcombe Lodge before it is fit to be occupied by a family of position. Why, it is almost twice too small, to begin with. Look at Egerton House, for instance.”

“True, true,” cried Austin eagerly, “I had never thought of that. Of course it must be altered—a paltry old-fashioned place— But I am afraid it will be very difficult.”

“Oh no! it won’t—not a bit. A handsome wing run up at each side, and a touch or two put to the centre building just to give it a character—something in the way of a cupola or battlemented tower perhaps—and say a Grecian portico thrown out in front—oh! the effect would be something remarkable.”

The picture thus conjured up was so pleasing to Mr. Jupp’s mind’s eye that the undertaker became finally forgotten in the artist, and he positively smacked his lips with hypothetical admiration.

“A capital idea!” said Austin, looking much impressed. “Really I wonder how you came to think of it.”

“Ah! but you see I’m in the way of hearing of such things,” replied Mr. Jupp modestly.

“Why, I happen to know of a case where just such an alteration was made (a nobleman’s house that was too small for him), and strange enough the architect was my own cousin. Tovey of Bristol, architect and land-surveyor—I don’t know whether you may have heard the name, but it will be a celebrated one some day, and I’m not afraid of saying so. And that reminds me, if you really thought of any little improvement of the sort, he would be just the man for it.”

“I’m sure you are very kind,” said Austin gratefully. “And upon my word— Dear me, how that knocker has been going all day!”

Another knock had just sounded at the street-door, causing both Mr. Jupp and his patron to look up with an air of some annoyance. In a minute more the summons was answered, and Mr. Podmore the lawyer was announced.

“My dear sir, how do you do?” said that gentleman, advancing with unwonted geniality of manner. “I have an appointment in the neighborhood at two—oh! just five minutes to spare, I see—and I could not bring myself to pass without looking in to inquire— Ah! Mr. Jupp.”

He nodded stiffly towards Mr. Jupp, who, understanding that he was in the way and having no further pretext for remaining, muttered something about a particular engagement, and bowed himself out. Meantime the lawyer went on:

“And Mrs. and Miss Waters—they are pretty well, I hope?”

It was the first time that he had ever taken cognizance of the existence of Mrs. and Miss Waters, and Austin could not repress a feeling of surprise as he answered in the affirmative.

“I am happy to hear it,” said Mr. Podmore warmly. “And now, as I perceive you have some writing to do—”

“Oh! but I am delighted to see you,” interrupted Austin hastily. “Indeed I particularly wished an opportunity of asking—I dare say you may think it rather a strange question, Mr. Podmore, but you see there are matters of business that must be thought of at the most—most trying times even. And I just wanted to ask if you thought it would take very long to—to prove the will, and—and get things into order, you understand.”

Mr. Podmore reflected.

“That depends very much on the firm to whose hands the business is intrusted, Mr. Waters.

And as of course I am not aware who may be the legal adviser—"

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, it will be you, won't it? I'm sure I never thought of any body else for a single instant, and if only you wouldn't object—"

Mr. Podmore seemed quite taken by surprise by the suggestion, but after gravely considering a few seconds, during which Austin kept his eyes entreatingly fixed on him, answered with much affability:

"Mr. Waters, I accept the charge. I shall have pleasure in endeavoring to promote your interests in every way in my power."

"I am so much obliged to you," said Austin humbly. "And if you could manage that there should be as little delay as possible—"

"I will take care of that, Mr. Waters. And of course I need not remark that any little advance which may be convenient for your immediate purposes I shall be most happy to make."

"You are very, very kind, I'm sure. You won't consider it odd, I hope, but one is naturally anxious to get settled, and then I have been thinking of some alterations in the house which I should like to set about pretty soon."

"Ah! some alterations in the house?" said Mr. Podmore, looking up from his watch, which he had just drawn out. "Dear me, I must be going. Chorcombe Lodge, you mean?"

"Yes, perhaps a wing to be run up at each side, and a cupola or turret or something like that on the top—to give it a character, you know. A good plan, don't you think?"

Mr. Podmore reflected again; he never gave an opinion off-hand.

"Well, I dare say something of the kind would be desirable—highly desirable indeed, now that I think of it. If you will excuse me, my dear sir, I must positively be off now. We will talk of this some other time, and perhaps I may be even able to recommend—but that will do afterwards."

"There is a Mr. Tovey of Bristol who has been named to me as a first-rate architect," said Austin, thinking it as well that Mr. Podmore should know exactly how matters stood. "It seems he is Mr. Jupp's cousin, and Mr. Jupp says—"

The lawyer slightly frowned.

"Mr. Jupp! Oh! never mind Mr. Jupp. I think I can find somebody to manage it a great deal better than Mr. Jupp or Mr. Tovey either. But if you will allow me, now I must really—Dear me, five minutes past two. Good-day—I shall have the pleasure again before long—good-day."

With these words Mr. Podmore, who prided himself on business-like punctuality, bustled out, and Austin was once more alone. But he had scarcely been left a minute to himself when Emmy made a violent interruption into the room.

"Oh! papa, I thought they were never going, and I have such a lot to tell you. She is to make me two dresses, just to begin with, that is; a silk and a grenadine—the grenadine for evening wear, with the loveliest bugle trimming. She made one exactly like it only last week for Lady Mary Somebody—I forget her name, but some earl's daughter or other, so you may fancy. And oh! papa, she says this Lady Mary and I are so much alike—we might almost do for sisters. Didn't she say so, mamma?" (here she turned to

appeal to her mother, who had just then entered) only that, if any thing, I have rather the best figure."

"My dear Emmy, I am afraid your papa will think your new dresses are making you quite conceited."

"Well, and if she is, she has as much to be conceited about as any Lady Mary of them all," said her father, looking at her proudly.

Emmy blushed, and seemed about to utter a disclaimer, when a new summons from the knocker came to interrupt the conversation.

"It seems nobody can let us alone to-day," said Austin grumblingly, but yet looking not displeased. "Who is it now, I wonder?"

"I—I fancy it is Mr. Thwaites's knock," murmured Emmy, and then, biting her lip for having committed herself so far, she added quickly: "Shall you and I go up stairs, mamma?"

"I think it would look unkind not to stop and see a friend like Mr. Thwaites, my dear."

Emmy said nothing, and as it was not her way to give up a point in silence, it is probable that her mother's decision coincided with her own wishes.

There was a minute's pause, during which Emmy felt very hot and uncomfortable, and then, as she had expected, Mr. Thwaites was announced. She had expected him, and yet as he entered she fell suddenly into a great flutter, and when it came to her turn to shake hands, the circumstances of their yesterday's parting recurred to her mind with such vividness that she could scarcely see or hear for confusion. She was so much confused that she actually fancied he might be going to squeeze her hand again.

But he did not give it even the faintest pressure, and, regaining composure a little, she remembered what had happened since yesterday, and understood how absurd that fancy of hers had been.

"I hope you will excuse the liberty," she heard him say presently—but he was speaking to her parents, not to her. "I thought I would just come and see how you all are, and—"

"It was very kind of you indeed," said Mrs. Waters cordially. "Pray take a chair."

He sat down, and every body else followed his example. As Emmy did so she took the opportunity of throwing a little glance across the room (he had stationed himself as far from her as possible), just for curiosity. She was half angry to see how gloomy and morose he was looking—almost as if he were sulking at the good fortune of the family.

"And then I wanted to—to congratulate you on—on what has happened—that is, of course—you understand what I mean. And I do congratulate you very, very much, Mr. Austin, you and every one."

Then he was not sulky, after all—only in low spirits, and that of course was a matter wholly beyond his own control. Emmy's little flicker of anger died out at once.

"We are much obliged to you, Mr. Thwaites," she heard her father say. "I accept your congratulations with a great deal of pleasure."

"It makes one happier to feel one has such sincere warm-hearted friends as you in the world," said Mrs. Waters earnestly.

What a kind darling her mother was, to be sure! Her father's manner was more dignified,

of course, but then her mother's was so sweet and winning—one could hardly wish it different.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you," said the visitor, looking at the table covered with papers. "You are busy, I see."

"Oh! there is no such hurry," answered Austin graciously. "A little extra to do and to think of certainly, but that is what we must expect for some time to come. We shall be moving soon, you know."

"Yes?" said the young man timidly. "To —to Chorcombe Lodge, I suppose!"

"To Chorcombe Lodge when it has been made fit for a gentleman to live in," responded Austin, with a somewhat haughty wave of the hand. "I am going to build."

Emmy looked up, so much interested in the information that for a moment she almost forgot the presence of John Thwaites.

"Build, papa!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly, my dear," he made answer a little grandiloquently. "A handsome wing on each side, with perhaps a battlemented tower and cupola in the middle, and a Grecian portico thrown out in front—Impossible to live in the place till something of the kind has been done, at all events."

Emmy was mute with astonishment and delight—delight to hear of such magnificence being in store for her, delight that John Thwaites should be there to hear of it too. And yet she knew all the time that what so gratified her would to him be more or less painful.

"I—I dare say it will be a great improvement," stammered poor John.

"You must come and see us when it is finished and tell us what you think of it," said Austin affably.

"I hope Mr. Thwaites needs no invitation to come and see such old friends as we are, wherever we may be," quickly added Mrs. Waters.

How beautifully considerate her mother was of every body's feelings! thought Emmy—every body's, though indeed John Thwaites had always been a favorite. Well, it was odd, perhaps, what any one could see in John Thwaites, but certainly her mother was an angel. And Emmy glanced up with a little look of filial admiration.

But as she raised her eyes she met those of John Thwaites, and had to lower them again instantly. Even then she was slightly troubled by the recollection of his look—such a sad, strange look it had been—a look seeming, as it were, to come to her from afar, across a great chasm. She could not help being rather sorry, and yet, sorry as she might be, her feelings were not without a little flavor of gratification. There is something pleasant in the consciousness of being sighed after as a bright particular star too far off for mortal attainment—pleasant, even though one may be one's self a little in the sighing mood too.

He sat a short time longer, listening to her father's plans for the new house, and though Emmy never again ventured to raise her eyes she did not lose that impression which his look had given her, of a great chasm being between them—a chasm which seemed to be ever widening.

At last he rose; a form of leaving-taking was got through, in what fashion Emmy hardly knew; and he was gone. For a little while she felt rather dull and listless, but she had too many things

to think of to be out of spirits long, and quickly recovered herself.

John Thwaites's congratulations were not the last received that day. An hour or two later a note was delivered, addressed to Emmy, and couched as follows:

"Egerton Park, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR EMMY,—I know how much you must all be occupied to-day, and therefore have not troubled you with a call, else you may be sure that the news I heard this morning would have brought me to you with all speed. Most heartily, my dear girl, do I congratulate you and all of you on your good fortune, and most heartily do I wish that with it (perhaps I ought rather to say in spite of it, but you would not agree with me there) may be bestowed every blessing that can make life happy. When I hear that you are a little at leisure I will come and see you, and offer my congratulations in person, as I am longing to do; meanwhile, with best regards to your father and mother, believe me ever, my dear Emmy, your affectionate friend,

"OLIVIA EGERTON."

"A very kind letter," commented Emmy, as she finished reading it to her father and mother. "But how funny to see her always pretending to despise money! The idea of wishing that one may be happy in spite of one's good fortune!"

"I should have thought she would have been above a piece of conventional cant like that," disdainfully said Austin Waters.

## CHAPTER VI.

MR. TOVEY.

A WEEK and a day had passed, and the young spring sun was shining brightly into Austin Waters's house, the blinds of which, no longer pulled down in decorous symbolism of the mourning within, were drawn up to the top as though to admit a double share of light and cheerfulness.

The funeral had taken place the day before, and a very magnificent and impressive funeral it had been. All the shops of the place had been shut during the ceremony (not that the deceased had ever been a specially good customer to any of them, but as a mark of respect, people said), the church was draped in black cloth at fifteen shillings the yard, and all the charity-school children were turned out in mourning. Mr. Jupp, happening for a few minutes to be alone with Austin in the dreary parlor at Chorcombe Lodge after the other mourners had departed, declared almost with tears in his eyes that never in the whole course of his experience had he known an affair of the kind to go off so well.

Nor was this all that Mr. Jupp took an opportunity of saying. By some means or other the conversation turned on the alterations required to make the house habitable, and Austin having made a casual inquiry as to what length of time they might be expected to occupy, Mr. Jupp answered:

"Well, really, sir—that depends so very much on the expedition of the parties to whom the arrangements might be intrusted. There's my cousin Mr. Tovey, for instance—you were think-

ing of him the other day, I believe—he is particularly noted for his speed in executing contracts of the kind. Would you wish me to drop him a line about it, sir? just by way of consulting him.”

“You—you are very kind,” said Austin, a little confused. “I should like it very much indeed, only— The fact is, I was mentioning the matter to Mr. Podmore the other day, and he seemed to have somebody in his eye who— Do you know any thing about it, then?” he inquired, breaking off, for Mr. Jupp was slowly shaking his head from side to side with a bland smile as though of pity for the infirmities of human nature.

“Mr. Podmore has a relation in the building-line, sir,” replied Mr. Jupp, still with the same bland smile. “His wife’s brother-in-law, to my own certain knowledge. Mind, not that I blame Mr. Podmore for a moment; he thinks he is doing the best for you, no doubt. But we are all aware that there is such a thing as being blinded by prejudice.”

“I see,” said Austin. “Then you wouldn’t advise—”

Mr. Jupp shook his head again, more vigorously this time.

“There is nobody living more upright than Mr. Podmore, I am confident. But you can’t trust people to be impartial when they are pushing their own relations, can you, sir?”

“I am so glad I mentioned the subject to you, Mr. Jupp. And are you sure you can recommend this Mr. Tovey, then?”

“Perfectly certain of it, sir. I don’t believe you would find any one to come near him either for efficiency, economy, or dispatch. But of course, if you wish to employ Mr. Podmore’s friend—”

“But I don’t,” said Austin emphatically. “I intend to do what is best for my own interests without being dictated to by Mr. Podmore or any body else. You can tell your cousin that I place the business in his hands, Mr. Jupp.”

“Thank you, sir; he will be very much obliged to you, I am sure. You would like to see him in the course of a few days, I suppose?”

“Yes, the sooner the better. I want the thing set about at once.”

“Perhaps he might manage to run over to-morrow, sir. My letter would be delivered in Bristol the first thing in the morning, you see, so that, supposing he has no previous engagement, he might be here by twelve or one o’clock if you wished it.”

“I should be very glad indeed, Mr. Jupp. Let him come as soon as he possibly can.”

And so the matter had been settled.

The next day came—the day on which it was permissible to pull up the blinds again—and as the hour approached at which Mr. Tovey might be expected, Austin and his family were all assembled in the shabby little parlor with which they were still fain to be content, and which looked shabbier than ever now; at least so Emmy thought; as she glanced down at the rich black silk in which her little figure was enveloped.

They had not been waiting long when Mr. Tovey was shown in—a spruce little man somewhere about forty-five years old, of trim cleanly cut figure, albeit slightly inclined to expansiveness, clear ruddy complexion, wide-awake-look-

ing blue eyes, and fair flowing whiskers just beginning to be touched with gray. He bowed politely to the master of the house, and with a certain air of gallantry to the ladies, and then, having taken a chair according to invitation and broken the ice by a casual remark on the weather, he opened the business thus:

“Ahem. I believe, Mr. Waters, you wished to see me with reference to some little alterations you were thinking of making in Chorcombe Lodge. Ah! a very fine situation, to be sure; I was studying it on my way from the station, and I never saw finer capabilities in my life.”

“I am very glad you think so,” said Austin, with much gratification. “And now what exactly would you recommend?”

“That depends principally on the sort of thing you wish done, Mr. Waters. If you and the ladies would be kind enough to favor me with your ideas—”

“I don’t understand much about building myself,” said Austin modestly. “I was thinking of wings and a cupola, and perhaps a Grecian portico or something of that sort. But I should leave it very much in your hands.”

“Ah! I see; given the existing building as a basis, and then do the best we can—just so.” Mr. Tovey considered a few seconds, and then, tapping his forehead triumphantly, resumed:—

“I know the exact thing that would suit you; I have it in my head like a map. Two wings—two stories high—long in proportion—with pillars in front forming colonnade; new façade for centre building, with lofty Corinthian pillars supporting sculptured pediment—the very thing.

“Upon my word, I think you have hit it,” said Austin admiringly.

“What a magnificent design!” commented Emmy. “Is it not, mamma?”

But its magnificence appeared to have fairly overpowered Mrs. Waters, who was silent, as though almost dismayed by so much grandeur of conception. Presently she said timidly:

“The only thing is, it seems to me hardly worth while, with our small family, to go to so much expense—”

“Oh! of course if expense is an object—” said Mr. Tovey.

“Expense is no object,” interrupted Austin with some haughtiness. “Pray go on, Mr. Tovey.”

“I don’t know if I can elucidate my meaning further by words, really. If you would be kind enough to let me have a sheet of paper and a pencil—”

Emmy sprang up to look for what was wanted, and Mr. Tovey began to take off his gloves by way of preparation.

“Strange news this is from Beacon Bay, sir,” he remarked as he unfastened with some difficulty a refractory button.

Beacon Bay—the place may not be marked so in all maps—was the name of an estate on the coast about seven or eight miles from Chorcombe.

“From Beacon Bay!” said Austin. “Dear me, I have not heard yet.”

“What! not heard that the property is to be disposed of?” rejoined Mr. Tovey, slowly tugging at the finger-ends of his gloves. “Yes, all in the market—every square foot of it. Ah! what an investment for somebody!”

Here Emmy laid the desiderated paper and pencil on the table, but as Mr. Tovey had still a glove to get off he naturally went on with what he was saying:

"Poor Mr. Newbold! he is very much to be pitied for having to part with it, but when people have no choice—I suppose if he could have kept it he would have been the richest man in England before five years are over."

"What!" exclaimed Austin, in surprise. "Why, you don't mean to say such land as that—"

"Oh! as for the land, that's nothing, but have you not heard about this new railway? Beacon Bay is to be brought into direct communication with London by a branch from Chorcombe, and then they talk of a pier and line of steamers to America. Why, the place will be one of the first ports of the kingdom in half a dozen years. Look at its natural advantages—look at its formation, look at its position."

"Very true," acquiesced Austin with rather a puzzled air.

Mr. Tovey had got off both his gloves now, but he had become too much interested in his subject not to follow it up.

"And then, while it rises into a great harbor at one end, it will rise into a fashionable watering-place at the other. Think of that hill to the west, and fancy it laid out in crescents and terraces, with villas dotted about here and there for effect—it might be made the model town of the British empire."

And as he thus spoke a certain fire of prophecy lighted up Mr. Tovey's eyes, and his ruddy face beamed ruddier still with the glow of artistic inspiration.

"Ah! a sublime idea!" he murmured in a lower tone. "And what a fortune to its promoters!"

"It might turn out very well, of course," put in Mrs. Waters with a glance at her husband. "But I am afraid there is a great deal of risk in all such things."

Mr. Tovey looked at the speaker, and his smooth upper-lip was contracted by a slight involuntary curl. But he answered with his usual urbanity:

"Nothing in this world is done without risk, madam—or so-called risk, at least. Look at all the great fortunes of the age. But it stands to reason that different minds should be differently constituted, and a good thing too, he! he! If every body was equally enterprising, nobody would have an advantage, you know."

"And is it quite certain this railway is going to be made?" inquired Austin.

"Oh! for that matter you may say it's as good as made already. The chairman and principal directors have set their hearts on it."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Waters, "you are surely not thinking—"

"Of course not," answered her husband rather tartly. "I wonder what put such a thing into your head. I only asked the question, casually, and so Mr. Tovey understood it, I am certain."

"Oh! dear me, yes, I understood it perfectly, sir," said Mr. Tovey, putting his gloves together and taking up the pencil, "and I am sure as for ever expecting or thinking of any thing else—I make a point of mentioning the subject wherever I go, because I think it is right that when there is

such an opportunity people should know of it, but of course it is nothing to me whether they take it up or not, and I don't expect that they should. Let me see, this is the house as it stands at present"—here he drew a few rapid lines. "Now on this side I propose to throw out a wing—so—and on this other side another wing—so—with a colonnade all the way along—so—and then add another story to the centre—so—to give it a suitable predominance over the wings, you see—and in front a façade of pillars—there, that's something like what I mean."

"Oh! how grand it will be!" cried Emmy enthusiastically, as Mr. Tovey displayed the paper on which he had thus developed his idea.

"But don't you think," suggested Mrs. Waters, "that if the wings were not quite so long, and of one story each—"

"Of course I could make them any size you like," replied Mr. Tovey with another slight curl of the lip—"only it would completely spoil the whole thing. For look here—and I should like you to look too, Miss Waters, please—we want the wings to remedy the defects of the original, don't we? Very well, the principal defect of the original is, that though the rooms are of a tolerable size, there is no suite fit for a grand entertainment, say a ball or concert, such as a great county family must sometimes give—ah! I am sure the young lady will agree with me there. Then we have nothing for it, you understand, but to make such a suite in one of the wings; therefore one of the wings must be long, therefore it must be correspondingly high, therefore the other wing must be just like it, therefore the centre must be raised in proportion—all a matter of sheer necessity, you see. I don't know if I have expressed myself clearly."

"Oh! but indeed you have," said Emmy. "I thoroughly understand, don't you, mamma? There is really nothing else to be done."

Mrs. Waters still looked not altogether convinced, and Mr. Tovey with an imperceptible shrug turned to address himself to her husband.

"Might I ask if the plan meets your approval, sir?"

"Oh yes! I think so—yes—indeed, as you say, there is evidently nothing else—And within what time do you think it could be finished?"

"I will make the necessary calculations, and let you know all particulars as soon as possible, sir. Of course I can give no details at present—on this head or any other—but you may depend on my doing my best to unite both expedition and economy."

"Thank you, Mr. Tovey. You see it is very awkward having no settled home of our own—"

"Oh! very—I quite appreciate that," said Mr. Tovey sympathizingly, beginning to draw on his gloves. "I suppose you are thinking of a furnished house in the mean time?"

"Yes," said Austin. "Oh! we intend to clear out of this hole immediately."

"In the neighborhood, sir, I suppose you would wish it?"

"Certainly, I shall have business to transact with Mr. Podmore for a long time to come. But have you any object—"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I was just thinking of a house that I fancy I have heard my cousin Mr. Jupp speak of, which would be the very place for you. I am afraid it's hardly fair of me,

for I happen to know there is a party very hot on it, but it seems so exactly suited—The Laurels—you know the Laurels, surely—at the corner of the old London road. A very complete residence, sir—stables, coach-house, and all that, of course—and elegantly furnished, in all respects adapted to a family of distinction.”

“I’ll speak to Mr. Jupp about it this afternoon,” said Austin decisively. “We could move into it at once, I suppose?”

“Not just directly, I am afraid, Mr. Waters, but almost. I think Mr. Jupp said something about the tenants leaving in a month.”

“A month!” exclaimed Austin in consternation.

“It will be vacant sooner than any other house on Mr. Jupp’s list, sir.”

“And are we to be kept waiting a month in this hole—I and my wife and daughter—to please Mr. Jupp?” asked Austin angrily.

“But if there is no other suitable house in the whole neighborhood, sir,” deprecatingly said Mr. Tovey. “I am very sorry for the inconvenience, I’m sure, and if I could think of some other way—Stop, I wonder if Mrs. and Miss Waters would object to run down to the sea-side for a few weeks—nothing like sea air for the roses on a lady’s cheek, they say, and after the trial they have sustained I should think it was just the thing for them.”

“It would be very nice indeed,” said Emmy, seeing that she seemed to be more especially appealed to.

“I knew the ladies would like it,” rejoined Mr. Tovey triumphantly. “And there you see what an advantage it would be to have a new marine city at Beacon Bay; it would be exactly what you would like just now—a convenient sea-side residence almost within reach of home. But as it is, I suppose you must just try one of the regular watering-places.”

“I should not like one of the regular watering-places at all,” said Mrs. Waters, looking at her husband. “If we could find some quiet sea-side place where we might all rest for a few weeks, with nobody to speak to—”

“Ah yes! and recruit for the fatiguing social duties that will be in store when you come home,” said Mr. Tovey, with a consolatory glance at Emmy, who was looking a little crest-fallen.

“Upon my word, it’s a good plan to take the opportunity of rest when you can get it, for you would not be able to join in any gayeties just at present, of course, whereas afterwards you will be perfectly overwhelmed. The exigencies of your position, you know. Well, if a quiet place is what you wish, I can lay my finger on the precise locality to suit you—a little sea-port in Dorsetshire where Mrs. Tovey and the children were last year” (he mentioned the name of a small fishing-village which shall here be called Nidbourne)—“an enchanting spot, with cliffs, and trees, and hill and dale, and purling brooks, and the rest of it, and such sea-breezes, oh! a perfect paradise. And if you don’t like the fuss and trouble of regular lodgings, there’s my wife’s sister, Mrs. Sawyer, who lives there, and would be only too happy to give up half her house to you—a sweet little villa not five minutes from the beach—and would make you as snug as snug. What do you say, ladies, not a bad idea, eh?”

“I think I could be very happy there for a few

weeks,” said Mrs. Waters rather wistfully. “If only you, Austin dear, are quite sure you would enjoy it—”

“I!” answered her husband. “Oh! but it is impossible I can go anywhere just now. For one thing, I have got so much to arrange with Mr. Podmore, and then I must stop and look after the building and so on. Why, you might know I am over head and ears in business.”

“You are going to stay here, Austin! Oh! then we will stay here too. We never could think of going away to enjoy ourselves and leaving you behind.”

“Oh! but Mr. Waters will enjoy himself too, never fear for that,” said Mr. Tovey cheerily. “You would find very fair bachelor accommodation, sir, at the Brown Bear,” he went on, addressing Austin; “it’s where I always put up myself, and upon my word it’s very fair indeed. But it would be *infra dig.* for ladies, of course—so unless you thought of stopping in this house—”

“Quite out of the question,” interrupted Austin.

“But why should it be, dear?” pleaded his wife.

“Because I don’t choose to live in such a cursed den when I can get out of it,” he retorted sharply.

“You know, mamma dear, we really couldn’t,” expostulated Emmy.

“Well, positively I confess I do not see how you very well could,” said Mr. Tovey. “And in that case, ladies, upon my word I think you’ll find my plan the best. And look at the benefit you will derive from the sea air.”

“Oh yes! mamma,” put in Emmy; “it will do you all the good in the world.”

“Of course it will,” said Austin. “It is the very thing you need.”

The upshot was that Mrs. Waters at last gave a reluctant promise to think the matter over; and Mr. Tovey shortly afterwards went away, perhaps understanding that it would be more judicious not to press the point further for that day.

Emmy appeared to consider the point as good as carried already, for no sooner was the stranger gone than she began descanting on the journey to Dorsetshire, and the sea, and the villa not five minutes from the beach, with a zest which showed that she had fairly set her heart on the expedition. It must be remembered that she had never been ten miles from Chorcombe in her life. But Mrs. Waters was evidently not yet reconciled to the project. Perhaps she understood that argument was of no use against Emmy’s impetuousness, for she made no attempt at further protest while the girl was present, merely listening to her rapturous outpourings with a quiet smile. But the first time that her daughter was out of the room she looked uneasily up from her work, and said:

“I should be much happier to stay with you, Austin.”

“I wish you could, I’m sure. But you see there is really no choice.”

Mrs. Waters sighed, perhaps thinking it rather hard that the first effect of wealth should be to force her away from the husband from whom in poverty she had never been a day parted. She continued to work a little while in silence, then, first casting a quick apprehensive glance round the room, resumed nervously:

"That letter you brought from Bristol the other day—it shows he is really thinking of coming over. And if it was to be while we were away—"

"Oh! but that would make no difference," said her husband hurriedly. "It would be as easy at that place in Dorsetshire as here, you know—better, indeed—yes, now that I think of it, I have no doubt he would very much prefer it."

"Would you not like to see him too, then?" said Mrs. Waters sadly.

"I? Oh yes! of course, of all things. But I could run down on a flying visit as often as I wished—there, that will do; the thing is settled, and I don't see the use of unsettling it."

Still the wife did not seem satisfied. But before she had time to say more, an interruption occurred the nature of which must be recorded in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VII.

### KIND FRIENDS.

"Oh! if you please, mum, here's a gentleman as says he's got something to show you."

So spoke the rough untutored voice of the char-woman, and immediately afterwards another voice—a very soft, suave one this time—was heard saying:

"If you don't regard the intrusion as too great a liberty, madam."

And behind the uncooth figure of the char-woman there appeared a well-dressed dapper personage of rather foreign appearance, with smooth, clean-shaven mouth and chin, dark hair and whiskers, and black bead-like eyes slightly drawn upwards at the outer corners. A massive Albert chain, with a large bunch of charms, was stretched across his waistcoat, and assisted Mrs. Waters in recognizing him as a Mr. Mossman, proprietor of a flashy-looking jeweller and silversmith's shop, which, with a pawnbroker's business attached, had been recently opened in the old-fashioned village High Street.

"Would you allow me, madam?" he said, gently raising his hand, in which he held a large flat parcel. "It has occurred to me that perhaps at such a time as this it might be a convenience to you to look over a selection of some of our superfine jet ornaments, so much in vogue at the present day among ladies of fashion, whether in or out of mourning."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Waters. "But really I am sorry you have had the trouble, for I am afraid—"

"Trouble, madam! don't mention such a thing. I would not have presumed to take the liberty, only ladies are apt to think it impossible to obtain first-class articles of the kind in a country-place, and it seems a pity that they should be exposed to the inconvenience and delay of sending to London for what they want, when it can be had as good or better on the spot. Ah! I ought to feel very much honored when I think how much annoyance my little establishment has been the means of sparing the ladies of our local aristocracy."

"Are you sure you would not like to look at some of the things?" Austin asked his wife.

"No, thank you, dear, I would really rather

not." Mrs. Waters was not given to be prejudiced against any one, but she could not help feeling an instinctive dislike to Mr. Mossman.

Here Emmy re-entered the room, casting a surprised glance towards the stranger, whom she did not at first recognize.

"A—a person who has brought some things for your mamma to look at, my dear," said her father, in explanation.

"Perhaps the young lady would like to inspect them," put in Mr. Mossman, eagerly. "A few very choice jet ornaments, suitable for fashionable mourning. Allow me to have the honor of showing them, miss; any decision you may or may not come to as to a purchase is quite a minor consideration with me, I assure you."

Emmy looked at her father, and, receiving a sign of approval, drew near the table with manifest interest, while Mr. Mossman proceeded to open out his parcel.

"It is always a pleasure to submit my articles to be inspected by ladies of taste, miss, because in such quarters I know they are always sure to be appreciated, and that is a sufficient gratification in itself for parties with any feeling for their business. Now here is an elegant set—necklet and bracelets, you see, ladies—first quality, with gold mountings, oh! altogether a sweet article. I never had but two of the pattern, and the other was ordered last week for a lady of title whose name I am not at liberty to mention. You have no idea of the effect, ladies—on a white arm, you know. If you would just allow me to try this bracelet on you, miss—"

Emmy looked again at her father, who smiled and nodded, and immediately one of the bracelets was fastened on her plump, round little wrist.

"There, ladies! Well, upon my word I never had an idea of the full effect of a jet ornament till now."

"It is a very pretty pattern, certainly," said Emmy, in evident admiration.

"I have not seen a set to compare with it this season," declared Mr. Mossman. "And at such a price too—why, it is ridiculous almost—only eighty-four shillings for the whole set. Gold mountings, you will remember, and attached to the necklet is a little locket for hair or other such memorial—use as well as ornament, you perceive. And so remarkably fashionable at the present crisis."

"Would you like it, Emmy?" inquired Austin, finding his daughter's eyes once more turned towards him.

"I think I should very much, please, papa."

"That is quite enough, my dear," said the father, producing his purse, which an advance from Mr. Podmore had replenished. "And now, Agnes, you must choose something too—come."

"Oh yes! indeed you must, mamma."

Poor Mrs. Waters protested that she needed nothing, but her protestations were of no avail, and the result was that between five and six pounds passed from Austin's pocket into Mr. Mossman's. As may be supposed, Mr. Mossman was profuse in his expressions of gratitude.

"So very much obliged for your kind patronage, sir," he said, as he tied up his parcel again.

"It is an honor which will do me a great deal of good in the neighborhood when it becomes known. If you ever happen to have any further

commands for me, ladies— All kinds of jewelry made and repaired, and watch-making in all its branches— In fact, that is a line in which we give particular satisfaction, and I am glad to say are making quite a connection among the chief county families."

"Oh, indeed!" said Emmy, for the information seemed to be addressed to her more specially than to any body else.

"Yes, I can assure you. Why, this very afternoon I have an appointment with a lady of rank near Bristol— If you will allow me, miss, I ought to have the little article somewhere about me now, if only I have not forgotten it. I should just like you to see it as a specimen of what we can do."

He fumbled in his pocket, and at last succeeded in finding a small morocco case, out of which he presently drew a lady's watch and chain.

"An exquisite piece of workmanship, miss, I flatter myself. Would you do me the honor of inspecting it?"

"Oh! what a lovely little watch!" said Emmy, examining it reverently. "Look, papa, this is something like Miss Egerton's that I was telling you of—the one the Clare Court people gave her, you know—only on the back of it she has her initials set in brilliants. And, oh! you have no idea how splendid it looks."

"I know exactly the kind of thing you mean, miss," politely put in Mr. Mossman. "Indeed it was only last week I sent home an article precisely such as you describe to one of our principal customers. It certainly has a very sweet effect."

"What would you say, Emmy, if I were to make you a present of a watch just like Miss Egerton's?" inquired her father.

"Papa!" cried Emmy, hardly believing her own ears, "but you are joking, surely. Why, Miss Egerton's watch cost ever so much."

"Joking! what should make you think I am joking?" said Austin, a little sharply. "How soon do you think you could let us have it if I were to give the order, Mr. Mossman—a watch something like that, with chain and all complete, of course, and the initials E. W. set in brilliants on the back?"

"I couldn't say to a day, sir. But I should hope before the end of the week—"

"Mr. Podmore, please, sir," said the voice of the char-woman.

And in the next moment there appeared Mr. Podmore himself, who, having been one of the mourners yesterday, had called to inquire after the health of the family.

He shook hands courteously with every body until he came to Mr. Mossman, at sight of whom his ponderous judicial-looking countenance darkened visibly, while with some sternness he remarked:

"Ah! Mr. Mossman! I did not know you had customers in this house."

"Mrs. and Miss Waters have been kind enough to examine a few little articles of mine, sir," replied Mr. Mossman, gathering his property together in some haste. "I have the honor to wish you a very good day, ladies—a very good day, sir." And, with a low bow to each of his patrons, Mr. Mossman made a respectful exit.

"You have not let that fellow talk you over into buying any of his trumpery, I hope," began

the lawyer as soon as the door was closed. "He is one of the greatest—ahem, I needn't say more. But I should not advise you to have any thing to do with him."

"My wife and daughter have made one or two little purchases," said Austin, reluctantly, "but nothing of consequence. Does he really bear such a bad character, then?"

Mr. Podmore shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Who would have thought it!" exclaimed Emmy, in horror. "And to think how near you were giving him an order for a watch and chain, papa! How very fortunate that Mr. Podmore came in just when he did!"

"Well, if you were near giving him an order for a watch and chain, I should say it was rather fortunate, certainly," observed Mr. Podmore dryly.

"We ought to be very much obliged to you, I am sure," said Mrs. Waters, answering for her husband.

"Oh yes! very much obliged," acquiesced Austin. But somehow he did not feel quite so expansively grateful to Mr. Podmore as he ought to have done. He was glad to be rescued from the further wiles of Mr. Mossman, of course, but it was not pleasant to find that he had been in need of rescue, and he was beset by an uneasy feeling that Mr. Podmore was beginning to take the command of him.

"I hope I see Mrs. and Miss Waters pretty well to-day?" inquired Mr. Podmore, addressing himself to the ladies in his most gallant manner. "Delightful weather, is it not? You must try to get out for a little walk this lovely afternoon; it is just what you want after staying so long in doors."

"I am going to send them to the sea-side," said Austin, not sorry to let the lawyer see that he was capable of taking so important a decision on his own responsibility.

"Indeed!" remarked Mr. Podmore. "And are the ladies going to make a long stay?"

"About a month, I think—till the Laurels can be got ready. I have arranged to take the Laurels furnished for a few months, just while the building is going on."

"Ah yes! the building at Chorcombe Lodge," said Mr. Podmore graciously; "you were consulting me about it the other day, I remember. And I believe I mentioned that I could recommend—"

"Thank you," replied Austin with some internal exultation; "but all that is settled already. Mr. Tovey—Mr. Jupp's cousin he is—has been here this morning, and I have placed the matter entirely in his hands."

"Oh! Mr. Jupp's cousin!" said Mr. Podmore, with a visible contraction of the brows. "He called here of his own accord, do you mean?"

"He called here by appointment with me," answered Austin.

"Oh!" said Mr. Podmore, with another contraction of the brows, so prolonged that Austin almost expected an overt expression of dissatisfaction. But if Mr. Podmore had any intention of the kind he thought better of it, and gradually permitted his forehead to smooth itself out again.

"Of course, Mr. Waters, that is an affair entirely within your own control" ("I should say so, indeed," thought Austin indignantly), "and



I have only to hope that you may have every reason to be satisfied with the arrangement."

"I hope so too," responded Austin, a little stiffly, for it seemed to him that Mr. Podmore's expression of hope was nearly tantamount to an implication of doubt.

At this juncture the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of more visitors. This time it was the Rev. Mr. Elkins and Mrs. Elkins who came to pay the tribute of their sympathies and inquiries.

The Rev. Mr. Elkins, the parish clergyman of Chorcombe, was a tall, thin, parsonic-looking man with straight nose, long flat upper lip, scanty hair and whiskers, and weak gray eyes. Mrs. Elkins was tall and thin also, and as parsonic-looking as it is possible for a lady to be, with tight pinched features, high cheek-bones, and dark iron-gray hair growing half way down her forehead, and arranged in long corkscrew ringlets on each side of her face. It was the first time that she had ever entered that humble parlor, but she advanced to shake hands with the inmates as graciously as though she had been at home there all her life.

"How do you do, Mrs. Waters? how do you do, Miss Waters? I hope you are both a little better to-day. Ah!" She accompanied the last words with a slight sigh and a gentle shake of the corkscrew ringlets.

Mrs. Waters and Emmy murmured something about being pretty well, and then, salutations having been duly exchanged with Austin and Mr. Podmore, the whole party got themselves seated—with some little difficulty and confusion, owing to the smallness of the room.

There was a solemn pause, solemnly broken by the Rev. Mr. Elkins.

"Mrs. Elkins and I could not be satisfied without coming to see how you were after your trial. Ah dear! his loss makes a sad blank in our little circle—a sad blank, does it not, Mr. Podmore?"

"Indeed it does," said Mr. Podmore, pulling as long a face as possible.

"And if we, who were comparative strangers, miss him so much, how infinitely more must he be missed by those to whom he stood on the footing of a near and dear kinsman!" pursued Mr. Elkins, with a sympathizing look towards the bereaved relatives. "Well, it is the common lot—the common lot."

"In the midst of life we are in death," sighed Mrs. Elkins.

"Ah! that is a truth of which we are indeed forcibly reminded on these melancholy occasions," rejoined her husband, unctuously. "Life is but a span—threescore-and-ten years, and how quickly they are gone!"

Austin could not help reflecting that in his uncle's case the threescore-and-ten had meant eighty-six, but he did not say so, and managed to answer the appeal with a sign of assent.

Perhaps Mr. Elkins thought that it was the pressure of emotion which kept the mourner silent; for he resumed, soothingly:

"But you must remember that what has been his loss has been your—What has been your loss has been his gain, I mean. Ah! a precious consolation, to be sure! And if it can be any mitigation of your grief to know how widely it is shared and sympathized with by all classes—

There never was a memory more universally respected—never."

Austin bowed; as his uncle's heir and representative he felt such an assurance to be somehow personally gratifying and complimentary.

"Oh! it is quite remarkable," declared Mr. Elkins. "Indeed, I have been considering whether it would not be almost a duty, where so much respect is felt, to organize it into some tangible shape."

Austin looked perplexed.

"A memorial window, or something of that kind, I was thinking of," the clergyman explained. "If the nucleus of a fund were once formed I am confident that I could obtain quite fifty names for smaller sums—very small sums I dare say they might be, but they would show the spirit of the givers, and that is the principal thing, we all know. And if it would be any gratification to your feelings to put up any little memorial of the sort, I should be very happy to allow it to be associated with Chorcombe church."

"You are very kind," said Austin, gratefully; for, though the proposal was rather a bore than otherwise, he felt that Mr. Elkins was paying him a great compliment. "Really I think it might be a very good plan."

"I knew the idea would please you, Mr. Waters. And what do you think, then, if the large window in the transept—"

"The large window in the transept?" put in Mr. Podmore, a little abruptly, "That will come to a good bit of money, won't it?"

"I could not say exactly," replied Mr. Elkins mildly, yet not without a slight accent of reproof. "But it will be easy to make preliminary inquiries in the proper quarters, and if Mr. Waters thought the estimate too high—"

"But I should think nothing of the kind," said Austin with a reproachful glance at Mr. Podmore for exposing him to so injurious imputation. "Of course in such a matter I should never dream of grudging any necessary expense."

"But excuse me, Mr. Waters," persisted the lawyer, "you see this is not a necessary expense at all. Those stained windows cost no end of money; and, for my part, I don't see what's the good of them except to keep out daylight."

"Oh, Mr. Podmore!" exclaimed the clergyman's wife, in simpering horror at such an avowal of barbarism. "How can you say such a thing—one of the chief ornaments of ecclesiastical architecture, you know. Well, I am sure Mr. Elkins and I are constantly remarking to each other that a stained window is just the one thing wanted to make our church what it ought to be."

"Oh! it will be an improvement to your church, no doubt," said Mr. Podmore, coldly.

"And the church shall have it too," rejoined Austin, emphatically, with a look of defiance in the direction of the lawyer. Well, at all events, Mr. and Mrs. Elkins would see that though he was Mr. Podmore's client he was not held in leading-strings by him.

Mr. Elkins expressed his gratification that his little suggestion for honoring the memory of his departed friend should have met with so much approbation; and then the conversation wandered off to other topics—the alterations in Chorcombe Lodge, the Laurels, the sea-side village in Dorsetshire, and Mrs. Elkins's ardent hope that after

their return she would have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. and Miss Waters very often. After a due time spent thus, during which Mr. Podmore showed no signs of moving (was the man staying to take care of him? Austin once or twice wondered), Mr. and Mrs. Elkins rose to go. Then, and not till then, Mr. Podmore rose too, and the family trio were once more left sole occupants of the little parlor.

But they had not been long alone when yet another visitor was announced—this time, however, not such an unfamiliar one as those that had just departed, being no other than Olivia Egerton.

She had already been to see her friends during the week of their seclusion, so on the present occasion did not think it necessary to begin either with congratulation or condolence, making her greetings very much as if nothing had happened.

"I have just called to have a little peep at you all on my way home," she said, as she took the chair which Emmy had flown to fetch with all her old alacrity. "I am so glad you are alone; it would have spoiled the pleasure sadly if any body had been with you, especially such people as those Elkinses. I met them coming from your house just now; I suppose they have been making all sorts of pretty speeches."

"They were very kind and polite, certainly," said Austin, who secretly thought Mr. and Mrs. Elkins very nice people indeed, and Miss Egerton's implied distrust of them absurdly unfounded.

"Kind and polite! Well, that is the most charitable way of putting it, at all events, and perhaps it is very ungrateful of me not to put it so too, for I am sure they have been kind enough and polite enough to me, in all conscience. But then I have an uncomfortable fancy all the while that they would not have been nearly so gushing if they had known me in the old time when I was pupil-teacher at Miss Lelande's."

"I almost wonder you care for remembering that time now," remarked Austin gravely. Miss Egerton's fondness for alluding to the details of her past life had always struck him as strangely undignified, and now that circumstances had made him her equal, he thought it only friendly to venture on a mild expostulation.

"What! Mr. Waters, would you have me so thankless as to forget the happiest days of my whole life only because they were the days of my poverty?"

"If they were the days of your poverty, I hardly see how they can have been the happiest of your life," said Austin, politely, but with a good deal of internal scorn for what seemed to him a rank piece of conventional hypocrisy and affectation.

"Ah! but then there was this charm about the days of my poverty; that they were such gloriously hard-working, busy days. I was of some use in those times, and it is so delicious to feel one's self of use. Upon my word, it was great fun—always something to think of, always something to try for—the multiplication-table to hammer into Miss Jones, and the French verbs into Miss Smith, and my own practising to squeeze in—I never was in want of subjects of interest then. I was useful, that's the long and short of it—useful to Miss Jones and Miss Smith, at all events; and it is always pleasant to be

spending one's days usefully, even if they are only days of poverty."

Austin was silent. He thought of the days of his poverty and how he had spent them—watching the smoke as it curled up the chimney, or counting the rain-drops as they pattered against the window, or at the best taking aimless walks in and about the village and listening to idle local gossip—and knew that he was not qualified to argue the question. And then for a moment there came, as it were, wafted across his memory a reminiscence of the far-off days when he was a hard-working clerk in a Liverpool office, as hard-working even as the pupil-teacher in her school, and he was almost ready to acquit Miss Egerton of affectation, after all.

Probably it occurred to Olivia to remember how different his experience had been from her own, for she made rather a sudden change of subject, turning round abruptly to ask Emmy:

"Well, Emmy dear, how are you getting on? You must be thinking of beginning your practising again soon; I have been missing you dreadfully for the last week."

"Thank you, dear Miss Egerton, I have missed you very much too. But I am afraid I shall not be able to begin again just for the present. Mamma and I are going to spend a few weeks at the sea-side."

"You and your mamma! By yourselves?" asked Olivia, in some surprise, for she had never known a separation in the family before.

"Papa is not able to go," explained Emmy. "So mamma and I are to stay by ourselves at a dear little village that has been recommended to us in Dorsetshire, to wait till the Laurels—Oh! I forgot, you don't know any thing about that: we are to live at the Laurels while the building is going on. And oh! what do you think—we have had Mr. Tovey the architect with us this morning, and he says—"

And here Emmy flew off at a tangent to expatiate eloquently on the grandeur of Mr. Tovey's ideas, and it was not till this topic was exhausted that she returned to the subject of the dear little village in Dorsetshire and expatiated with equal eloquence on that. Mrs. Waters murmured one or two hesitating objections against a scheme to which she was still only half reconciled, but she was soon completely vanquished by the arguments which her husband and daughter jointly brought to bear on her; and Emmy was left mistress of the situation, to describe the imagined charms of Nidbourne in her own way. This she did with the greater gusto as she saw Miss Egerton listening with more than usual appearance of interest.

"I declare, child, you have been talking about the sea till you have made me quite long for it," said Olivia at last, as Emmy came to a pause from sheer want of breath. "If you and your mamma have really decided to go to this place, I wonder if you would have any objection to let me go with you?"

"You, Miss Egerton!" cried Emmy, in ecstasy. "Do you really mean—"

"Yes, I think this Nidbourne would be just the nice little place I should like to rusticate in for a few weeks. And then, you see, going with you I should get a holiday from Mrs. Waddilove" (Mrs. Waddilove was Olivia's companion), "and that will really be a great comfort, to say nothing

of the comfort it will probably be to poor Mrs. Waddilove to get a holiday from me. So if you are sure you would quite like it—"

"Like it!" exclaimed Emmy. "Oh! Miss Egerton, it will be delicious."

"It would make us both a great deal happier," said Mrs. Waters, who, reluctant as she was to leave home, felt that absence would at all events be more endurable in the companionship of a friend like Miss Egerton.

"And for me," said Olivia, "I am sure it will be by far the best holiday I have had since Miss Lalande's time—ah! how I used to enjoy my holidays then! Not that it is to be quite a holiday either; we must try to get on with our music and drawing between the walks, you know, Emmy. Very well, we are all agreed, it seems, so we may regard the thing as quite settled."

And from that time the thing was regarded as quite settled. Mrs. Waters and Emmy were to go down to Nidbourne with their friend Miss Egerton, while Austin staid behind to give his affairs the advantage of his own personal supervision.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LAST DAY AT THE OLD HOME.

THE next few days were for the whole Waters family a season of unprecedented excitement and confusion. They were on the point of moving from the house which had been their home for twenty-one years; Mrs. Waters and Emmy were, moreover, preparing for their trip to Nidbourne; and in addition to all this, there were a host of minor claims on the family attention in the shape of congratulatory visits, architectural plans and estimates, business interviews with Mr. Podmore, and so on *ad infinitum*. Among other incidents of the time, a watch and chain arrived from Mr. Mossman's, accompanied by a bill for seventy guineas, which bill, with the goods, was immediately returned to him; but there were so many things of greater interest to be attended to that this little unpleasantness was scarcely thought of, and even Mr. Mossman's threats of legal proceedings passed almost unnoticed. In this state of bustle and turmoil nearly a week went by, and at length the day came which was for the present to be the last spent by Mrs. Waters and Emmy in Chorcombe.

It chanced that on the afternoon of that day Emmy was walking home by herself from Egerton Park, where she had been to make an appointment with Miss Egerton for their meeting at Chorcombe station next morning. The weather was bright and spring-like, and Emmy, tripping along the road by the side of the budding hedge-row, thinking of her approaching journey and still more of the glories awaiting her on her return, found the walk very pleasant. After a while, however, she gradually ceased to think of these things, and somehow got thinking instead—

Not that the circumstance of John Thwaites coming into her head at this juncture proved any thing, you must understand. She had just passed the opening of the lane which led down to the mill where he was a clerk, so that the train of thought really suggested itself quite naturally. And, besides, had she not that very afternoon been seeing Miss Egerton—Miss Egerton who

was always praising him up, and talking as though there was not another young man like him in all England? The idea! As if there were not loads and loads just as nice, and a great deal nicer! as if she herself did not know— But when she tried to reckon up John Thwaites's equals or superiors, somehow their names did not occur to her.

Yes, but then all the young men she knew lived in Chorcombe, and Chorcombe was only a miserable little country village. When she went to London, as her father had promised that she should, and saw all the fine gentlemen of Almack's and Rotten Row— At this point there floated before her a vision of a gallant cavalier mounted high on a curvetting steed and making a bow to her as she passed him on another—such a bow, so low and tender and reverential, as she had once seen Miss Egerton receive from her cousin Mr. Randal on that very road. When did John Thwaites ever make such a bow as that? Why, she had never seen him on horseback; she doubted even whether—

"Miss Emmy!" said somebody behind her.

She looked round with a great start, and with a greater start still saw, almost close to her side, John Thwaites himself. Considering that he was the identical person of whom she happened to have been thinking, there is no wonder that she found herself a good deal flurried.

"How do you do?" he said, in rather a low, quavering voice.

"How do you do, Mr. Thwaites?"

Hereupon they shook hands; they had been on hand-shaking terms for years, and could not possibly have done less. But her daintily-gloved little hand had scarcely touched his broad sunburnt fingers before it was released again, so that this was a ceremony very soon performed. And then came a pause, during which both were at a loss as to what to do or say next. They could hardly wish each other good-bye, seeing that both had manifestly been walking in the same direction.

"You are going home, Miss Emmy?" he asked at last, and of course she had nothing for it but to answer in the affirmative.

"I was going home too," he rejoined. "This is one of my early days for leaving."

With this they both moved onward, which was certainly a great deal less awkward than standing staring at each other in the middle of the road. But Emmy felt scarcely less flurried now than at first—it was so strange to be walking along side by side with a young man. And, besides, only fancy if any body from the village was to meet them!

They went on for some minutes without speaking—that creature John Thwaites had not a bit of tact; and Emmy was at last compelled to find something to say, just to break the silence.

"I hope mamma and I shall have fine weather for our holiday," she began. "We have arranged to go to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" he said, and his voice was still unusually tremulous. "I did not know it was to be so soon. So this is the last time I shall see you for a long while, I suppose?"

As he spoke these words there was something, so profoundly melancholy in his tones that Emmy out of mere human sympathy, could not help feeling a touch of melancholy too as she replied that she supposed it was.

"I hope you will have a very pleasant time," he said, presently.

"Thank you, Mr. Thwaites," and Emmy really felt rather grateful as she made the answer, for she knew that he was speaking sincerely. "I wish the same to you, I am sure."

"To me, Miss Emmy!" He sighed, and walked on a little way in silence, then resumed: "Some people would say I ought to be pleased enough just now, for I've had a great piece of luck to-day—a piece of luck as the world goes, that is."

And then he sighed again very deeply, and Emmy felt wonderfully inclined to sigh too. But she restrained herself, and merely answered, with a little twirl of her parasol:

"Indeed! I am happy to hear it, and so will papa and mamma be, I am certain. And might I ask—"

"I am to be manager—manager with a salary of three hundred a year. Enough to keep me over and over again, you know. So I ought to be content of course."

But he was not content evidently, for he gave another sigh, and walked on with his eyes mournfully fixed on the ground.

Emmy did not know how it was, but as he thus spoke of his prospects she began to tremble all over, and had not energy left even to twirl her parasol.

"I am very glad Mr. Thwaites," she stammered. "I—I congratulate you very much."

"I should have been glad too a month ago. But I don't care about it one way or the other now."

In saying this he stole one little look towards her, a look which she felt rather than saw, and yet which, though she scarcely saw it, disturbed her strangely. Was he going to say more or not? She listened intently.

"No, I don't care now," he went on in a hoarse voice. "A month ago I should have died of joy almost. But I don't care now."

A choking sensation rose to her throat. She knew that he was in grief, and knew that she alone could comfort him. And perhaps she was not altogether indisposed to comfort him, for, happening just then to give a glance upward, she found her eyes dimmed with something like a tear. At the same moment he gave a glance upward too, and their eyes met.

She let hers drop again instantly, and bit her lip, while the blood rushed to her cheeks with shame and vexation. Did he think he had found her out, then? did he think— All that there was of rebelliousness and resistance in her nature sprang to arms at once. She felt ashamed as she had never felt ashamed before, and, because ashamed, was therefore angry—angry with herself for her momentary weakness, angry with him for having been its cause. And, as a consequence of her anger, the coquettish spirit which had been so unwontedly soft and yielding a minute ago became suddenly cased in sevenfold hardness.

"Dear me! how strange!" she said with a light, little laugh. "I should have thought promotion was as much worth caring for at one time as another."

There fell on his face a certain pained distressed look very sad to see. But Emmy did not see it, and perhaps if she had seen it would not have let it make much difference in her conduct.

"Yes, I think we shall have nice weather, really," she went on, by way of changing the subject, looking up at the clouds with as great an appearance of carelessness as she could assume. "I hope so, at least; we shall enjoy ourselves so much if only we have it fine. You never were at Nidbourne, perhaps? They say it is such a pretty place."

She forced herself to rattle on thus to cover any vestige of agitation which he might possibly notice in her manner. If she had known how agitated he was himself, she might have spared herself the trouble.

"It will be quite a delightful change for us," she continued. "And when we come back we are to live at the Laurels—till the alterations at Chorcombe Lodge can be finished, you know. I suppose you have not seen Mr. Tovey's plans yet; they look very well, really."

"Indeed!" he managed to say.

"Yes, upon my word they do. He is to make us such a beautiful long ball-room—it will be quite a pleasure to dance in it. It is an object with us to have a good ball-room, of course, for I fancy we shall be giving balls pretty often now."

She had recovered from all outward signs of agitation by this time, and had no excuse for talking thus, unless it was that there was an evil spirit in her heart which prompted her to tease and torment as much as possible the poor young man who walked by her side. For she knew perfectly well that she had got upon subjects which could not but give him pain, and somehow just because she did know this she felt tempted to go on with them.

"I suppose you will. Yes, no doubt you will be very gay," he made answer in low, depressed tones. But the melancholy which had so touched her in his voice a while ago made no impression on her now.

"I expect we shall, rather," she said, toying again with her parasol. "Papa talks of taking us up to London for a season, and that is a promise I shall not let him forget, you may be sure. I do so long to see London, you can't think, to say nothing of the parks and balls and operas. And I shouldn't wonder much if we were to go on to Paris."

She had got the whip firmly in her hand, and, as she was by no means tired of using it, there is no saying how many more lashes she might have given her victim if he had not found an opportunity of escape. But fortunately for him they had by this time reached a point where the highway, now just entering the outskirts of the village, branched into two roads, one leading straight into Chorcombe High Street, and consequently Emmy's nearest way home—the other winding round by outlying farms and homesteads which constituted a kind of suburban district. Here John Thwaites, having endured till he could endure no more, came to a pause.

"I think I must say good-bye now. I have some business up this way."

"Oh! have you?" said Emmy, with a negligent elevation of the eyebrows. "Good-afternoon, then, Mr. Thwaites."

"Good-afternoon, Miss Emmy."

At first it seemed that he was going away without so much as shaking hands, nor perhaps would he have been wholly without excuse if he had done so, all her fingers being occupied in the un-

doing of a knot into which she had worked the tassel of her parasol. But apparently he could not bring himself to part so coldly, for after a slight hesitation he held out his hand, and, as hers for an instant rested in it, murmured two or three inarticulate words that sounded like "God bless you."

And then he was gone.

Emmy might walk on now without fear of what might be said in case of a meeting with the most malicious gossip of all the neighborhood. She had got rid of that creature John Thwaites, and not only had got rid of him, but had snubbed him and vexed him and put him down in such style as completely to avenge any and all annoyance which she might at any time have suffered by his means. How strange, then, that under these circumstances she no sooner found herself alone than she was ready to burst into tears!

Yes, actually ready to burst into tears, and so probably she would have done, only that she was approaching the region of shops and houses where she felt herself the observed of all observers. It was necessary to be circumspect, and, holding her parasol before her face, she walked on with her head very erect, trying to think of the triumphs in store for her in London and Paris. But she did not succeed in fixing her ideas as she could have wished, and, as she penetrated farther into the village, held her parasol closer and closer to her face, walking very fast to make people think that she was in a hurry.

Whether or not by reason of this precaution, she reached home without being accosted, and, hastily passing by the parlor door, ran up stairs to her own room. She was longing to be alone.

But just as she was about to enter, she heard her mother's voice calling her from the adjoining chamber, and was obliged to answer:

"Well, mamma dear?"

"You can come in, Emmy."

With some reluctance, and a little previous manipulation of her pocket-handkerchief, Emmy obeyed, and presently stood in her mother's bedroom, where Mrs. Waters was engaged in the double task of packing for the journey and arranging her things for removal.

"What did you want to say, dear?" asked Mrs. Waters, who had made the not unnatural mistake of thinking that her daughter had come up stairs to look for her.

"Oh! nothing particular," said Emmy, fiddling with her bonnet-strings. "Miss Egerton will be at the station at ten to-morrow morning—that is all, I think. Well, and what have you been doing, mamma? Ah! you have nearly cleared out the closet."

She stepped forward to view the interior of an empty closet at the farther end of the little room, not because she really took any interest in it, but because she had thus an excuse for standing with her back to her mother.

"Yes, dear. And stowed away every thing in the chest of drawers, ready to be taken into the new house."

"I see," said Emmy, with a languid glance at a little mahogany chest of drawers that stood in a corner hard by—it was a relic from the old Liverpool days, and was one of the few pieces of good furniture in the family possession.

"And how have you been enjoying your walk this fine day, Emmy?"

Emmy felt a sudden catching of the breath, and had some difficulty in finding voice to answer.

"Very much, mamma, thank you," she replied after a brief pause, and then added quickly, before her mother had time to go on with the subject: "Oh! what a nice writing-case you have here mamma! Where did you get it?"

She drew a step nearer the chest of drawers as she spoke (she was able to do so without turning her head), and stood contemplating with great apparent interest a leather writing-case which lay in one of the open drawers. She was still standing with her back to her mother, else she might have noticed with some surprise that Mrs. Waters all at once became very much flushed.

"I have had it by me some time," was the answer, given in rather low, faltering accents.

But Emmy was too much engaged in studying how to seem natural herself, to notice any peculiarity in her mother's manner.

"Indeed! I wonder I have never seen it before. And are you going to leave it behind, then? I should have thought it the very thing for travelling with."

"I—I have so few letters to write, you know, dear."

"Ah yes! to be sure. And now, mamma, I think I will go and take off my bonnet."

With these words Emmy somewhat abruptly wheeled round, and by a dexterous evolution managed to get to the door without having occasion to look her mother fairly in the face. In another minute she was in her own room, endeavoring to compose herself after her flurry, and assuredly with no further thought about the leather writing-case.

The subject, however, was not so quickly forgotten by Mrs. Waters. Scarcely had her daughter left the room when, having first softly secured the door, she too advanced to the chest of drawers and stood contemplating the writing-case. Nor did her interest stop here, for presently she drew a bunch of keys from her pocket, and, fitting one into the lock, threw back the leathern lid.

A quantity of unused note-paper and loose manuscript jottings were lying uppermost; but, passing by all these, Mrs. Waters drew out a folded letter, with a faded superscription, evidently written many years ago. She did not unfold it, but merely stood poising it in her hand, and gazing at the yellow characters of the address with eyes which, as she looked, became dimmed with tears.

After a while she raised them and glanced wistfully at the grate, half filled with the charred fragments of old letters and tradesmen's bills which she had that morning been destroying. Then she glanced back again at the letter, and for an instant her fingers closed on it as though about to tear it in two.

But in the next moment her fingers relaxed. She shook her head sadly, and with a sigh slowly replaced the letter where she had found it, among the loose papers in the writing-case, which she locked and in its turn replaced in the drawer where it had first attracted Emmy's attention. And, finally, having carefully covered up the case from view, she shut the drawer, taking particular pains to see that it was properly fastened.

## CHAPTER IX.

MR. GRAHAM.

A RED-TILED fishing-village deposited in front of an amphitheatre of green hills that swelled upward on north, east, and west, with just the rudimentary beginnings of a fashionable sea-side resort in the shape of a tiny esplanade and a few groups of white-stuccoed houses at one end—such was the place which is here to be called Nidbourne.

A pleasant place it was, set in the midst of pleasant sights of sea and shore. Here the beach with the long line of ever-shifting waves which seemed to be perpetually attacking, and the steadfast rampart of verdant-crested cliffs which seemed to be perpetually resisting; there sunny breezy stretches of hill-side, where the sheep cropped the short grass shorter still, and shady nooks where the dark fern-leaves might hang all day without being stirred by a breath of wind, and waving woods whose flickering green net-work opened every now and then to show a glimpse of the distant horizon line where the blue of the sky melted into the deeper blue of the waters. By the general character of its scenery Nidbourne belonged not so much to Dorset as to Devon, from the borders of which county it was indeed not very remote.

In this quiet, sequestered spot the three ladies from Chorcombe found the bright spring days pass, on the whole, very happily. The repose and seclusion of her life here was just what poor Mrs. Waters most needed after the anxiety and excitement she had lately gone through, and, much as this first separation from her husband pained her, she could not help taking more or less pleasure in the natural beauties around her. As for Emmy, she might perhaps have preferred a place where some little fashionable activity was going forward; yet even Emmy could not but enjoy rambling about on the beach and the hills at Nidbourne. For her nerves had quite recovered now from the temporary disorder by which they had been so strangely attacked on that last afternoon at Chorcombe—quite recovered, at least, if we except one or two occasions on which the song of the nightingale, or the silver sparkle of moonlight on the rising and falling waves, make her feel a little more sentimental than usual. But indeed she had small leisure to be sentimental, even had she been that way inclined; the energy of Olivia, as self-elected governess, keeping her constantly employed—now with her piano, now with sketching out-of-doors or at the open window, so that not a minute of the day was lost. The so-called holiday was in truth a season of pretty close application not only for Emmy, but also for Olivia, who worked quite as hard at teaching as her pupil did at learning. But Olivia enjoyed her visit to Nidbourne none the less on that account, rather all the more, often declaring that she had spent no such happy time since the old days at Miss Lalande's. Thus, so far as she was concerned, Olivia was certainly not sorry that, when the appointed time arrived for returning to Chorcombe, it was reported thence that the Laurels could not be got ready for at least another fortnight or three weeks.

About ten days of this supplementary time had elapsed—passing as pleasantly as those which had preceded them—when one morning as the three

ladies were at breakfast Emmy noticed that Mrs. Waters, who had just received a letter from her husband, did not read any part of it aloud as usual, but silently put it into her pocket, on finishing it, with rather a grave and abstracted look.

"All is well at home, I hope?" asked Emmy, not without some little anxiety.

Mrs. Waters roused herself.

"Oh yes! all quite well, and the building going on nicely." She was silent again for a little, then resumed, somewhat hesitatingly:

"It seems likely that—that we may have a friend coming to see us in the course of a day or two. A Mr. Graham—an old friend who went out to India a great many years ago—he has written to your papa to say he has come to England on business, and—"

"Mr. Graham, mamma! I never heard of him before."

"He went away so many years ago," said Mrs. Waters, in a tone half of apology. "But he is a very old friend."

"And is he coming to see us, did you say, mamma? All the way to Nidbourne on purpose to see us?" asked Emmy, in amazement.

"And—and for the sake of the sea-air, you know, dear. It seems he has done his business, and has a few days to spare before starting; so, as Nidbourne is such a pretty place—"

"How strange that I should never have heard of him before!" exclaimed Emmy, meditating on the subject with increasing wonderment. "A Mr. Graham! What is his Christian name?"

At first it seemed almost as though Mrs. Waters had forgotten it, for she remained some moments without speaking.

"His Christian name is Henry," she answered at length.

"And he has come over from India on business, you say, mamma? What is he, then?"

"An engineer," replied Mrs. Waters, still in a rather low, wavering voice—"partner in a large firm. He is considered very clever, I believe, and has been sent over to inspect models for some important works they are going to begin."

"It is really very strange!" reiterated Emmy.

"And is he alone, or does he bring a Mrs. Graham with him?"

"He is not married, my dear."

"If he is not married, I wonder he has not found time to write to you and papa in all these years. I don't remember ever seeing you get a letter from him."

"Perhaps not—I don't know. People who are busy have so little time for writing, that—Another cup, Miss Egerton?"

There were a great many more questions that Emmy would have liked to ask, but she restrained herself, partly because—reminded of Miss Egerton's presence—she did not wish to appear too inquisitive, partly because she thought it best for her purpose to make her inquiries gradually. But though she suffered the subject to drop for the present out of the conversation, she could not help, spoilt child as she was, recurring to it in her own mind with a certain sense of jealous mortification at being so completely taken by surprise. How very odd that she should never have heard of this Mr. Graham before—a person who now turned out to be an intimate friend of her father and mother! Who could he be? and where could

they have got acquainted with him? Really it almost looked as if they must have purposely made a secret of his existence, or how was it that she had never known, at least, that they had a friend in India? And she had never known that they had a friend or acquaintance anywhere out of England—unless indeed it was that horrible Uncle Harold, who long, long ago had fled to some far-away country, America or Australia, or—or India, perhaps. But no, that was quite impossible; her father and mother respected themselves too much to keep up any connection with such a character; and as for introducing him as a personal friend, and under a false name too—the idea was utterly ridiculous, and it was only a pity it had ever come into her head. After all, what was more natural than that they should have a friend she had never happened to hear them speak of? People can not be always talking of their past life; and, for that matter, perhaps his name had been mentioned a dozen times in her presence without her having chanced to notice it. She was quite annoyed with herself for letting such an absurd fancy get hold of her for an instant—a fancy which she felt to be almost an insult to her parents—and was ready to wish that Mr. Graham, whoever he was, had never existed.

There was another besides Emmy ready to wish something of the same sort, and that other was Olivia Egerton. Not that her uncharitable feelings towards Mr. Graham were in the slightest degree due to any such suspicions as those which disturbed Emmy; a comparative stranger to Chorcombe, she knew nothing about the person whom Emmy thought of with horror as her uncle Harold. But Olivia was enjoying herself in this pleasant sea-side retreat with her two friends as she had not enjoyed herself for years, and was naturally annoyed at the idea of having her enjoyment spoilt by the intrusion of a stranger.

"If the man really comes, there will be an end to every bit of pleasure," she thought to herself, petulantly. "Was there ever any thing so tiresome—just when we were getting on so nicely! And I know so exactly what he will be—a creature without an idea in his head beyond money-making, on the one hand, and brainless dissipation that he calls society, on the other—a compound of the city clerk and the heavy swell, like all the Anglo-Indians I ever saw, except the officers, and they are made up of the heavy-swell element pure and simple. Most provoking, to be sure! Well, he isn't here yet, and we must just hope he may change his mind and let us off, after all."

And, thus endeavoring to console herself, Olivia set about her ordinary avocations—that is to say, she spent the day till dinner-time in the open air, walking and talking and sketching and superintending the sketching of her pupil. And after the early dinner she sat down as usual by the piano, to give Emmy her music lesson.

The lesson that day was, up to a certain point, a very prosperous one, partly perhaps because Mrs. Waters had gone out to do some shopping in the village, and both teacher and learner were able to feel entirely unrestrained and at their ease. Be this how it may, certain it is that Emmy played some difficult passages with more than usual spirit, and that Olivia was more than

usually warm in her expressions of encouragement.

"Good—very good—a little faster—one, two, three—so, that's it—decrecendo—pianissimo—don't forget the *rallentando*—very good—now a tempo again—faster, faster—don't be afraid—*allegro viv*—"

Olivia suddenly broke off, and Emmy's hand as suddenly fell from the keys. A third person was in the room—a visitor who, mumbly announced by a rustic maid-servant, had entered unperceived, and had been obliged to advance to within a few steps of the piano in order to make his presence known.

Olivia and Emmy were too much put out by the unlooked-for appearance of a stranger to be able to ask any questions as to his name or business; and, as he, on his side, seemed at least equally embarrassed, there were a few seconds during which they could only sit contemplating him in unfeigned wonder and curiosity.

He was a tall, powerfully-made man, with dark hair and eyes, and apparently about forty years old, more or less, gentlemanly in demeanor, though somewhat rugged-looking, as one who cares little for appearance, and who has spent much of his time under exposure to sun and wind. For the rest, his features were such as, if they had been a little less bronzed, might have been called handsome but for certain deep lines which care or thought had marked on the forehead, and which imparted something of sternness to the whole face—sternness only partially redeemed by the dark light of deep hazel eyes more than usually clear and expressive.

"I am afraid there must be some mistake," he said, at last, looking round not without a shade of nervousness in his manner. "I came to see Mrs. Waters, but—"

"Oh no! there is no mistake," answered Olivia, graciously, for she had just bethought herself of the Mr. Graham whose expected arrival had been announced that morning. "Mrs. Waters is out just now, but if you don't mind waiting—Miss Waters and I are expecting her back every minute."

"This is Miss Waters?" said the stranger, and turned rather an observant glance on Emmy.

Emmy, to whom the idea of Mr. Graham had also occurred, and who happened to be looking towards him at the time, saw the glance, and as she saw it there occurred to her likewise that other idea which had come into her head in the morning. And though she was quite sure that the idea was preposterously unfounded, she could not help taking a slight prejudice against the visitor on the strength of it, even before she knew whether he was Mr. Graham or not.

"Pray sit down," said Olivia, politely, and, still with a shade of nervousness, the visitor obeyed. The two ladies came away from the piano, and seated themselves likewise, and then followed an embarrassing silence, which Olivia, now fully restored to self-possession, was the first to break.

"Mrs. Waters told us this morning that she was expecting to see an old friend from India in the course of the next day or two—Mr. Graham, I think, she said. I suppose—" And here she looked at the new-comer with an air of courteous inquiry.

"My name is Graham, yes," he made answer. "I—I am afraid I am interrupting the lesson,"

he added, with an uneasy look towards the door, as though he would not have been sorry to get away.

"Pray don't mention it," rejoined Olivia. She waited an instant to give Emmy an opportunity of putting in a word of civil greeting to her mother's friend, but Emmy was sitting shy and silent, with evidently no notion of doing the honors, and Olivia had nothing for it but to resume. "Mrs. Waters will be very glad to see you, I am sure. You have been a great many years absent from England, I believe?"

"Yes, a very great many years."

It was apparent that the conversational initiative was to be thrown entirely upon Olivia. She felt this to be rather unfair, but prepared to do her best under the circumstances.

"And you like India very much, no doubt—people who have been there always do, I think. May I ask what part you have lived in most?"

"I am sometimes obliged to be up the country for months together. But my head-quarters are at Bombay."

"Bombay—then you don't live out of the world, at all events. I suppose Bombay is a very gay place."

"I hardly know—I suppose so—oh yes! of course."

"You speak as if you did not avail yourself much of its advantages in that respect," said Olivia, a little inquisitively.

"I! Oh dear no! I don't care for such things at all."

So it appeared that there was nothing in him of the heavy-swell element, at any rate, though indeed his manifest embarrassment in ladies' society had sufficiently proved that already. Did he only consist of the city clerk, then? Olivia could not make him out at all. There was a new interval of silence, during which she was fain to admit to herself that the heavy-swell element has its conveniences for the purposes of conversation. If the man had been a fop, or only half a fop, she would at least have known what to say, but now—she could not talk business to him, and probably he could talk of nothing else. Not that he exactly looked of the city-clerk type either, but then Olivia knew so well what those Anglo-Indians were.

Meanwhile the silence was becoming quite oppressive. Its oppressiveness seemed to be felt at last even by Mr. Graham, for, after sitting some time with his eyes fixed on the ground, he looked up and cast them with a restless motion round the room, as though seeking something that should help him out of his difficulty. After a while they fastened on a chalk landscape drawing that stood propped on a small portable easel at the farther end of the room.

"That is intended for a sketch of the view from this window?" he inquired, evidently with something of an effort, but he was reduced to help himself, now that Olivia would no longer help him.

"That is certainly what it was intended for," said Olivia, with a smile at the wording of the question. "Dear me, Emmy, I am afraid it looks as if the intention had not been carried out very successfully."

"It is a sketch by Miss Waters, then?" he rejoined, with another glance at Emmy.

"Yes," said Olivia, "and we had rather flat-

tered ourselves it was a tolerable specimen of its kind. I do hope you will be able to admire it a little."

"I will see it closer if you will allow me."

He went up to the easel, and stood looking at the sketch for some time, but without making any remark. It occurred to Olivia that perhaps his silence was a judicious mode of concealing entire artistic ignorance.

"And are these other drawings also by Miss Waters?" he asked next, pointing to an open portfolio that lay on a table close at hand.

"Yes, or most of them at least," said Olivia.

"Oh yes! you may look at them, if you like."

He turned over two or three of the drawings which came first to hand, laying them down again with an absence of remark that piqued Emmy not a little, while it confirmed Olivia in her previous suspicion as to the reason of his silence. At length he came to one which he looked at longer and more closely than any of the others, while his face lighted up with an expression of something like interest.

"There is something more than intention here," he said, after a minute or two spent in examination. "The view from the window again, I see, but very differently treated. This is not yours, surely?" he added, with a doubtful look at Emmy.

"Oh no! that is not mine," answered Emmy, with a decided pout on her rosy lips, for she felt quite insulted by the low opinion of her abilities which the tone and manner of the question implied. "That is Miss Egerton's, of course?"

"Yours?" said the visitor, glancing from the drawing to Olivia, and then back to the drawing again.

"I am glad you like it," said Olivia, modestly, but not without some internal self-complacency, for after such a proof of discrimination she could not help feeling a sudden respect for Mr. Graham's critical powers. "I should be rather pleased with it myself, if it were not for something about those hills in the background—I have always felt there was a mistake somewhere, and yet I can't tell exactly what it is."

He directed a quick, scrutinizing look at the natural landscape without, and then once more brought back his attention to the sketch.

"You have not allowed quite enough for the space between that farthest peak and the ridge in front," he pronounced presently, "and the slope here is not exactly what it ought to be. If this line were brought a little lower, and this other so"—and here he passed the blunt end of a pencil lightly across the paper—"I believe you would need nothing more to put it right."

"I think I understand," said Olivia, who indeed fancied that she saw the way to making a very great improvement in the correctness of her work. "Let me see; this line so, and this other so—is that what you mean?"

"Not quite at such an acute angle, that would be going too far the other way. I am afraid I shall injure your drawing if I touch it, but if you could give me a piece of note-paper—Oh! thank you, this will do nicely."

He took a sheet of paper which Olivia handed to him, wrapped it to steady it round a small book which he drew from his pocket, and went to the window, where he stood copying down the outline of the distant hills, while Olivia and Emmy



awaited the result in respectful silence. Olivia could not help feeling a good deal surprised. It really did seem as if the man was capable of taking an interest in something besides his business.

"That is what I mean, or something like what I mean, at least," he said, after a few minutes, and handed to Olivia the paper, still wrapped round the book which had been his improvised easel.

"Why that is the very effect I had been trying for without being able to get it," exclaimed Olivia, in undisguised admiration. "What a wonderfully correct eye you must have!"

"A little knowledge of drawing is so necessary in my business that I am obliged to cultivate it as much as I can."

"Ah yes! to be sure, your business," said Olivia; then, conscious of having spoken with a touch of superciliousness quite uncalled for under the circumstances, she hastened to add: "You must have always had a strong taste for drawing, at any rate."

"I don't know about always," he answered, with a half-smile. "But since I have been obliged to make it a study I have certainly learned to get very fond of it."

On hearing him thus speak of the facility he undoubtedly possessed as of a comparatively recent acquisition, Olivia was again a little surprised. Had he ever had any stronger tastes, then, before being obliged to cultivate this one?

"I will set about altering my drawing at once," she said aloud. "I may keep this paper by me as a guide, I suppose? But stop, this is your book, I think."

She handed him the little volume round which the paper had been wrapped. In doing so her eye caught the lettering on the back, and with greater surprise than ever she saw that it was a pocket edition of some Greek classic. She had never imagined to herself a man of business who should be a classical student as well, and felt for once thrown quite out of her reckoning.

She was just thinking what she could appropriately say by way of carrying on the conversation—and somehow her standard of appropriateness was by this time much higher than it had been at first—when the door opened, and she was relieved of her difficulty by the entrance of Mrs. Waters.

On discovering the unexpected presence of a stranger Mrs. Waters was visibly startled—so much startled, indeed, that she turned unwontedly pale, and for a moment stood, as it were, transfixed just within the threshold. Mr. Graham on his part seemed a good deal confused also (how entirely unused to society he evidently was!), and an awkward pause ensued without greetings being exchanged on either side. At last, though with perceptible nervousness, he made a step forward, and, extending his hand, said, a little more tremulously than he had yet spoken:

"Mrs. Waters, I am glad to see you again."

"How do you do, Mr. Graham?" she said, faintly. But it was manifest that she had not yet recovered from her surprise.

They shook hands, and then, after another awkward little pause, she regained sufficient self-possession to murmur something about taking a chair, and both sat down. Emmy seated herself too, close to her mother, while Olivia, seeing that

she was released from all further duties of hostess-ship, and judging indeed that it would be in better taste to leave her friends and their visitor to themselves, retreated to the farther end of the room and busied herself in the correction of her drawing.

It has been said that Emmy seated herself close to Mrs. Waters—perhaps not altogether uninfluenced by the consideration that thus she could see and hear all that passed between her mother and the mysterious stranger. For Emmy was naturally of an inquisitive turn, and her curiosity on the present occasion had been worked up to its highest pitch. She had not failed to notice her mother's agitation, and though she was aware that Mrs. Waters, living for years a quiet, out-of-the-world life, was apt to be flurried by the presence of visitors, she could not help reverting to the suspicions of the morning, and wondering more seriously than she had wondered yet, whether there could really be any thing in them. So it need not be said that she watched and listened with all her eyes and ears, and Emmy's eyes were very bright and her ears very sharp.

It was some little time before any thing further was said on either side; but presently Mrs. Waters, with a momentary look at Emmy, began, timidly:

"I heard from Austin—from my husband—this morning that we were likely soon to see you—to have the pleasure of seeing you. You are thinking of staying some time at Nidbourne, I believe?"

"About a fortnight, I think. I must leave in time to catch the next mail from Southampton."

"You are going to leave England again so soon?" and Emmy fancied that she detected a slight intonation of regret in her mother's voice. But then it might have been partly for the sake of politeness.

"I must," answered the visitor. He looked at Emmy and hesitated, then went on: "I hope Mr. Waters was quite well when you heard?"

"Quite well, thank you," said Mrs. Waters. Emmy listened to hear if she asked after any friends of Mr. Graham's in return, but she did not, only adding: "I think you will find you have made a good choice in coming to Nidbourne. It is a very nice place."

"So it seems. You have been here some time, I think?"

"Yes, more than a month. It has been an exceedingly pleasant change."

"I suppose it has. You live in a very pretty situation."

"Oh! very much so, indeed."

How stiff and ceremonious they were, to be sure! It seemed impossible that this could be the conversation of two persons who had ever stood in any near relation to each other—the relation of brother and sister, for instance. Oh! surely it was quite impossible. And yet—Emmy was very acute, but she was also very inexperienced, and felt fairly nonplussed.

The dialogue went on in this style for some time longer, very heavily and draggily, and with long pauses, as though even the formal platitudes which were all that the speakers found to say cost them some trouble to bring forth. Emmy was almost sure that those suspicions of hers were all nonsense. At length Mr. Graham, as though in despair of being able to carry on the conversa-

tion further, looked at his watch, and rose to take leave. Mrs. Waters did not say a word to induce him to remain, and rose too, with a promptitude which to Emmy, a country girl accustomed to see a great deal of pressing, seemed strangely cold and inhospitable. Perhaps the same idea occurred to Mrs. Waters herself, for as he made his adieux she said, rather timidly and undecidedly: "I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you often during your stay. You could come and dine with us to-morrow, perhaps—two o'clock is our hour."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad."

Thus the invitation was given and accepted, and even Emmy thought that her mother could hardly have done less than make some arrangement of the sort.

It was Emmy's turn to shake hands with the visitor next, which she did rather coldly, for it is always difficult to forgive a person who has once been the object of a prejudice, even though a mistaken one. This done, he made a step towards the door, then halted, and turned hesitatingly in the direction of Olivia. Olivia had just raised her eyes from her drawing, so that each saw the other looking. He wavered still for an instant, then, deciding hastily, went forward to take leave of her also.

"Good-morning," he said, and, after another moment of uncertainty, he shook hands with her as he had done with Mrs. Waters and Emmy. "I ought to apologize for taking up so much of your and your pupil's time."

"Oh! not at all," said Olivia. "I ought rather to thank you for so kindly putting my sketch right. It is an immense improvement."

"You have done it already!" and he glanced down at the drawing with evident surprise at her rapidity, not unmixed with gratification. "Yes, that is it exactly—I am very glad to have been of a little use to you, though you would have found it out for yourself, of course. But now I must not disturb you longer."

He bowed and Olivia bowed, and in another minute he was out of the room. Mrs. Waters followed him to the landing just to see if the servant was in attendance, but she was back again almost directly, and the three ladies were left together to criticise the departed visitor as they would.

The only person, however, who seemed inclined to say much in the way of criticism was Emmy.

"What a queer person!" she commented, as soon as he was out of hearing.

"Do you think so, my dear?" said her mother, with rather a feeble smile.

Olivia made no remark.

"A very queer person, indeed," rejoined Emmy, emphatically. "One would think, to see him, he had been a hermit all his life—so awkward and blunt—and quite rude too sometimes, I declare" (here Emmy was thinking of his implied disparagement of her sketches). "Well, he may be very nice and all that, but I can't say I more than half like him myself. And oh! did you notice the absurd mistake he made—actually talking to Miss Egerton about her pupil! I believe the stupid creature takes her for my governess."

"How awful!" said Olivia, with a silvery laugh. "Quite a frightful calamity, really."

She became silent for a few seconds, reflecting with an air of unusual gravity. Presently she spoke again, this time with what appeared to be a touch of embarrassment, while a very becoming flush rose to her cheeks. "Seriously though, as he seems to have got the notion into his head—and it is a natural notion enough under the circumstances—I should be very glad if—if you could manage not to undeceive him. It is so pleasant to leave one's pomps and vanities behind for a little."

"Oh! Miss Egerton!" remonstrated Emmy. "Do you mean to say you really wish people to think—"

"I really do, child," answered Olivia, with a slight deepening of the flush. "I hate to be ticketed as a great personage; you ought to know that by this time. So, as a favor, I beg that you will let people take me for whatever they may think I look like; and this Mr. Graham among the rest."

"Oh! of course if it is to please you, Miss Egerton—"

"It is to please me," persisted Olivia. "And you, Mrs. Waters, you will oblige me, I am sure? It is such a delightful reminder of old days to be taken for a governess; I would not have the illusion destroyed for the world."

Mrs. Waters did not exactly see the importance of the point one way or the other. But of course she could not refuse a wish urged by her friend with so much earnestness, and Olivia obtained the required promise.

"I am so much obliged to you," she declared. "Those royal robes are horribly stifling, and it is such a comfort to get them off! No wonder Haroun Alraschid enjoyed those incognito walks of his."

"But he didn't take them for enjoyment," put in Emmy; "he wanted to find out what people thought of him."

"Ah! to be sure, so he did," said Olivia.

## CHAPTER X.

A S O U' - W E S T E R .

THE weather had been very fine at Nidbourne for the last month, but on the morning following that of Mr. Graham's arrival came a change. A breeze sprang up during the night, which gradually increased to a gale, and by the time Olivia and her friends were stirring it was evident that the day was to be a boisterous one. The sky was sunless and lowering, with dark gray masses of cloud sweeping over its face from the south-west; the wind rushed against the walls of the house in wild, prolonged gusts, like a living thing attacking them; while outside the trees, and even the very blades of grass, might be seen bending and quivering with every fresh onslaught. Meantime at a little distance (for the house was situated some way back from the beach) there was heard, above the loudest whistling of the blast, the dull, steady roar of an angry sea.

However, the ladies were not to be thus deterred from their accustomed exercise. Olivia and Emmy, indeed, staid in doors for half an hour or so after breakfast, but only in order to make sure of a music lesson, of which the expected

company of Mr. Graham might balk them in the afternoon. As soon as this was over they went out to join Mrs. Waters, who, having some marketing to do, had not waited for them, but had arranged to meet them on the parade.

Turning their faces resolutely towards the wind, the two friends battled their way down to the front of the village, and at length emerged on an open space looking on the sea. The sight they saw there was certainly worth seeing. Near the shore the great powerful waves, lashed into fury by the bluster overhead, curled their huge necks, and hurled themselves with blind, bull-like energy on the beach, threw up a white shower of foam as though in anger at their own impotence, and then, with a mighty noise of seething seas and rattling boulders, rushed back to prepare for another attack. Away from the shore, under a grim scowling sky, tumbled and tossed in infinite desolation a boundless waste of gray deserted waters—gray save for the breakers that streaked them here and there with ominous white, and deserted save for one or two diminishing specks on the leaden line of the horizon. Far and near, every thing that met the eye was suggestive of the reserve forces of nature.

Olivia and Emmy stood contemplating the prospect for some time, and then, bethinking themselves that Mrs. Waters would probably be waiting, hastened along to the strip of terraced walk dignified with the name of parade. This said parade was not more than a hundred yards in length, and as just now there were hardly half a dozen people on it (this was the dead season at Nidbourne), a glance was enough to show whether the person sought for was among them.

"That is mamma—I know her by her shawl. And so she has actually met that Mr. Graham!"

As Emmy spoke, she jerked her head rather viciously in the direction of a lady and gentleman who, apparently earnestly engaged in conversation, were walking a little way in front. For a moment she felt awfully suspicious; so suspicious that she was ashamed of herself directly afterwards. It was natural enough, when she came to think of it, that her mother should have met Mr. Graham on the parade; the parade was just the place for accidental meetings. And of course when one met an old friend it was necessary to speak.

On discovering the pair in front, Olivia and Emmy quickened their pace in order to come up with them. But Mrs. Waters and her companion still walked on, evidently too much engrossed in what they were saying to vouchsafe a look round. As Emmy noticed this, she remembered the few stilted sentences in which their conversation had been carried on in her presence, and again that horrid idea of yesterday morning came rushing into her mind. She was conscious of a feeling of positive dislike to Mr. Graham.

The earnestness with which the two seemed to be conversing must really have been rather marked, for it struck not Emmy only, but Olivia. As has already been said, Olivia was not sufficiently acquainted with the details of the family history to suspect what Emmy suspected; but she certainly observed that the discourse of the couple before her, whatever it was, appeared to be very interesting. It even passed through her head to wonder whether peradventure Mr. Graham could be one for whom in past days Mrs. Waters might

have entertained a feeling deeper than mere friendship, and for whom, for the sake of those past days, she still could not help keeping up a trace of sentimental regard. But then Olivia remembered that, according to all appearance, Mrs. Waters must be several years older than the stranger, and she rejected the notion as altogether wild and untenable. Nor was it entirely without a sensation of relief on her friend's account that she found herself able thus to regard it.

"Mamma!" cried Emmy at last, impatiently.

She and Olivia were by this time almost close to those in front; so close that Mrs. Waters heard in spite of the high wind, and with a start stopped and turned her head.

"Why, Emmy!" she said, smiling, though perhaps rather artificially. "I have just met Mr. Graham, you see."

"We have been following you ever so long, mamma," said Emmy, with somewhat of an aggrieved air; "I thought you were never going to look round. Ah! how do you do?" she added coldly, as Mr. Graham stepped forward to greet her.

Olivia was standing a pace or two behind, and thought that perhaps Mr. Graham might altogether forget to notice her. But no sooner had he exchanged salutations with Emmy than he made another step forward in the direction of Emmy's companion, and, though again with a little apparent embarrassment and constraint, shook hands with her as he had done yesterday. Perhaps, owing to the infectiousness of example (for she was not naturally shy), Olivia felt slightly embarrassed and constrained also, and the ceremony was gone through in rather an awkward silence. The silence might have continued some time longer, for neither Mrs. Waters nor Emmy seemed inclined to break it, had not the wind come to the relief of all four by blowing a corner of Olivia's shawl over her head in such unceremonious fashion that she could not but laugh in disengaging herself.

"What a stormy morning!" she exclaimed, as with reddening cheeks she drew round her arm the refractory corner, which Mr. Graham had helped to capture. "I am afraid this will give you a very unfavorable idea of Nidbourne weather."

"No, I think I have been rather enjoying it than otherwise. I have been watching the sea all morning."

"We have been watching it too—Miss Waters and I. Thank you, I am quite comfortable now. It seems a very selfish thing to say, but I do like a rough sea—to look at, at least. But what a sudden change since yesterday!"

"It seems sudden, yes. Still, I rather expected it, from the look of the sea in the evening."

"Dear me, and I was saying it seemed so settled, was I not, Emmy? But then I never was the least bit weather-wise, and never shall be, I am afraid."

"I have seen a good deal of the sea at different times of my life," explained Mr. Graham.

As Emmy heard, she could not help remembering that before marriage her mother's home (and consequently the home of her mother's brother likewise) had been in a North of England sea-port. But of course she said nothing, and, lest she should be so much as suspected of suspicion, turned with an air of indifference to look at

the long line of white breakers which fringed the coast. "But she had hardly looked when she exclaimed:

"What can all those people be doing down there? Just look! there seems to be quite a crowd. Has any thing happened, I wonder?"

She pointed to a part of the beach about a quarter of a mile off, where, in front of the oldest and most unfashionable end of the village, a group of some thirty or forty people was collected—a very unusual phenomenon in that quiet part of the world.

Mr. Graham cast a quick glance out to sea.

"There is a boat trying to come in," he said.

The ladies looked, and saw, a short way from the shore, just opposite the point at which the throng was assembled, a small black object, of which they could scarcely tell at first whether it was a buoy or a little fishing-boat, tossing up and down among the waves, sometimes borne high on the crest of a great ridge of water, sometimes lost to sight altogether.

"Good heavens!" cried Olivia, "what will become of them? Oh! but let us go and see—let us go at once."

She seized Emmy's arm, and all the party hastened forward in the direction of the rapidly increasing crowd, watching meanwhile as narrowly as they could the movements of the boat. As they drew nearer they saw that it was still tossing about as tumultuously as ever, and making scarcely any way. The tide, which had been coming in all morning, had just turned, and notwithstanding that the wind was south-west, and consequently blowing towards the land, the backward current of the water was so strong that it was scarcely possible for so small a boat on a rough sea to make head against it. Nor was this the worst of the danger.

"I don't see how she is to get in with only one man to work her," said Mr. Graham, after looking fixedly for a minute or two.

"Only one man!" echoed Olivia, in dismay. "Poor unfortunate creature! what can have tempted—"

"He has gone out to bring in his nets, I fancy. You see those stakes yonder;" here he pointed to sundry posts the tops of which every now and then became visible above the waves in the neighborhood of the boat. "That is where they spread their nets. I suppose this man wanted to save his, and could find nobody to help him."

Olivia looked towards the boat in compassionate terror. Yes, it was too true; on advancing nearer she could see for herself that it had only one occupant—a big stalwart-looking man, whose features, as he was ever and anon upborne by a wave, she could discern plainly, as also his straining efforts to approach the shore. But frantic as those efforts evidently were, they were all too feeble to force a passage through the rolling masses of water which, as fast as the boat had laboriously made a few feet of way, hurled it back and left it helplessly rocking in a valley of white foam.

By this time the party found themselves on the outskirts of the crowd—a crowd made up almost entirely of the inhabitants of the fishermen's cottages which mainly composed that end of the village.

"Oh! what do you think? will he be lost?"

cried Olivia, fastening eagerly on a gray-haired old fisherman whom she thought likely to be more experienced than the rest.

"Can't zay how it mid be, miss. But it do look like it."

"What! with so many standing by! Oh! can nothing be done to help him?"

"I don't know what," said the man, looking stolidly out at the dreary prospect of angry waves and frowning sky. "You can zee vor yourself. Well, whatever comes to en, 'twere noo volk's doens but his own. I twold en he were a vool, and zoo he were. When he couldden geet two men or dree men to goo, a chile mid ha' known woon man wouldden be much good a bringen hwome nets a day like this. But he were like a madman about theasem nets o' his, though he'd be pleased enough now to come back 'thout 'em if zoo be he could come back at all. Well, it idden my vault; I twold en avore he went."

"And zoo I twold en too," put in another bystander, "and zaid I wouldden goo wi' en not voa virty poun'. But he were always woon vor his own way, or his nets 'ud ha' been zafe at hwome like his neighbors. I twold en yees-terday it were a-gwayen to come on a blwoy."

"He don't understan' the ways of our zea noo mwore than of us," said the old man to whom Olivia had spoken. "Let en goo back to where he come vrom, and where maybe the zea is better vriends wi' en. It idden because he's took a Dorset wife that he's got a right to take the bread out of other volks' mouth that he don't belong to. Teeh! did you zee that? If he geets knocked among theasem pwosts it will be bad vor en."

A heavy wave had struck the boat, and sent it reeling along towards the place where the stakes already spoken of showed their half-submerged heads above water. The unfortunate rower seemed to be losing strength, for the wave had subsided, but the boat drifted nearer and nearer to the danger.

"Ahoy! my boy, sheer off, sheer off!" bel- lowed the old fisherman, warmed up into sudden excitement by the imminence of the peril, and vociferating with superhuman energy through a natural speaking-trumpet formed of his hands.

But he might as well have spoken to the wind, which bore away his words as they left his lips, and dissipated them uselessly into space.

The boat struck heavily against one of the posts and swung round. At the same instant another wave was seen rolling forward with gigantic arched neck to the assault, and all on shore held their breath.

A great roar and dash, and every thing was lost to sight behind a cloud of spray. The wave had met the obstacle and broken over it.

The spray dispersed, and again the boat was visible, still in the same place as before. There was a sound from the spectators—not a cheer, however, but a half-shuddering groan. The boat, entangled among the posts so that it could not drift farther, lay floating keel uppermost.

In another moment a head appeared above the water a yard or two beyond the boat, and again those on shore held their breath. The waves came and went, and still the head was seen on the surface, but still no nearer than at first. It was evident that the backward suction

of the tide made it as difficult for the swimmer to come within reach of the support offered by the upturned hull as it had previously been for the rower to bring his craft to land. At last a mighty wave rose, and, dashing over the head of the still struggling man, hurled him violently forward. When the subsiding spray again allowed him to become visible, he was discovered clinging to the capsized boat, and there ran through the group of spectators a murmur of satisfaction.

"Yees, but what's the good o't iv we can't geet at en?" Olivia heard the old man beside her say between his teeth.

Apparently the same question suggested itself to others, for the murmur of satisfaction died away, and a dead, despondent silence followed.

A few seconds passed thus, and then the lookers-on saw a hand held up above the waves, gesticulating wildly towards the shore.

"Oh! save him! save him!" exclaimed Olivia, turning with passionate entreaty towards the old fisherman. "Will you let him drown in your sight, and not so much as try?"

"We'd be very glad to zave en, miss, if zoo be we could. But as vor tryen 't'ud be nought but putten ourselves in the zame case."

"What! and will nobody help him, then?" Olivia looked across the sea to the spot where the hand was still held up in mute supplication, and felt her very heart turn cold with horror.

"Who will put out with me?" cried a voice behind her.

With a sudden bound of all her pulses, Olivia turned round and saw the speaker. It was Mr. Graham, who, having made choice of a roomy, strong-looking boat, one of three or four that stood drawn up on the beach, was already stooping to undo the fastenings.

For a while there was no answer, but presently the old fisherman made himself spokesman for the rest.

"It can't be done, maister. Our lives be as dear to us as thik chap's to him. Look at tha zea, and we know zom'at of the zea, mind you."

"Aye, aye, we know," said another, and a general hum of assent went round the crowd.

Mr. Graham looked steadily towards the grim expanse of waters.

"I know something of the sea too," he replied, "and I believe it can be done. Twenty pounds apiece to the three brave fellows who will go with me—come."

Another silence followed—rather a longer one this time—and then the old fisherman, with a dogged shake of the head, spoke again:

"Twoont do, maister, twoont do. You have got the money p'raps, and p'raps you haven't; but money is money, and life is life."

"And that man's life!" cried Olivia, looking despairingly at the uplifted hand still stretched out to implore aid. "Oh! can nothing save him, can no money—"

"Money woont make the zea goo down when he's up, miss."

Olivia could say no more, could only watch the beseeching gestures of that hand in silent anguish. There was a pause, and then a voice behind her, the same voice that had spoken before, asked:

"Will none of you come with me—not one? Then must I go alone?"

There was no answer, and Olivia understood that the invitation was rejected. She looked round—with a face strangely colorless, but with eyes that glowed with a concentrated fire of resolution.

"I will go with you, if you will let me. I can row, and shall surely be better than nobody."

"You!" ejaculated Mr. Graham, and looked at her as though scarcely sure that he had heard aright.

"Yes, I," said Olivia quietly, and she spoke with so assured a manner that not one of all the by-standers who turned their astonished eyes towards her could doubt that she meant it.

Among those who looked with the most attention was the old fisherman. She was about to speak again, when, laying his hand somewhat unceremoniously on her shoulder, he pushed past her towards Mr. Graham, saying:

"Daug it, if the maids ben't afeard o' the zea, 'twoont do vor the men to be. Here, maister, I'll goo wi' you, vor woon."

"And I vor another, maister."

"And I."

The crew was made up, but still from a dozen to twenty more volunteers offered, who, finding themselves not required to man the boat, devoted their energies to dragging it down to the water's edge, bringing oars and grappling-irons, and otherwise expediting the launch. With so many to help, all the preparations were soon made, and in scarcely more time than it takes to write the words the little craft was fully equipped, and with her living freight lay just within the white fringe of froth left by the last wave, ready to try what chances might await her on the stormy sea which chafed and fumed beyond.

Ah! how that sea chafed and fumed, surely! As Olivia saw the great breakers rise up and roll towards the shore with a roar as of wild beasts advancing on their prey, she was half impelled to rush forward to the boat and implore its crew not to put forth. But then her eye caught sight of that other boat on which the breakers had already wreaked their fury, and of the hand which still beckoned entreatingly beside it; and she felt that at any risk the attempt at rescue must be made. Still, at the same time, she felt that the pain of seeing it made was almost more than she could bear, and with an instinctive seeking for sympathy and companionship she looked round for Mrs. Waters and Emmy, whose very existence she had forgotten. They were standing at a little distance, both greatly agitated, especially Mrs. Waters, who seemed almost to cling to her daughter for support. Half involuntarily Olivia drew a few steps nearer to them.

Again she turned towards the sea. The boat was in the act of pushing off, following in the wake of a retreating wave with an impetuous rush that threatened to drag it under another wave which was coming in, and which for a moment seemed to stand over it like a wall. Olivia expected nothing else but that boat and men would be engulfed together, and averted her eyes. Presently she heard a great shout from the spectators which did not sound like a shout of horror, and she ventured once more to glance upward. The tiny bark, well away from the shore, was riding triumphantly on the top of the waves.

A few minutes of suspense succeeded—min-

## CHAPTER XI.

## AFTER THE STORM.

utes every one of which looked like an age. Again and again the boat was hidden from view by some great bank of water that rose up between it and the shore, but again and again it reappeared in safety, each time nearer the spot where the drowning man still clung to the capsized craft, still held in its place by the wooden stakes among which it had drifted. At last the spot was all but reached.

Once more Olivia withdrew her gaze. The boat, as it ceased to cut through the water, rocked so violently to and fro among the breakers that she absolutely dared not watch it further. What if it should share the fate of that other!

One second passed, and another and another, and in the intensity of her straining expectation Olivia's heart seemed to have stopped its pulsations. Suddenly she heard a new shout from those on the beach, and on raising her eyes, the first sight that met them was a wild waving of hats and caps in front of her. She looked towards the boat, and saw that it had left the overturned keel behind (with no man clinging to it now), and was making for the shore. The rescuers had done their work, and were coming home with the rescued.

But a heavy and perilous task yet remained for them. The wind-beaten waves still swelled and tossed furiously on every side, and the same backward draught of water which had rendered it impossible for one rower to approach the shore made it a work of danger and difficulty even for a crew of four. But in spite of danger and difficulty—in spite of towering waves which flung them forward with a violence that threatened to swamp them, and then dragged them back a longer way than a minute's patient rowing sufficed to make up—in spite of all obstacles, it was apparent that the distance between the boat and the land was diminishing.

Meanwhile Olivia stood and watched with an anxiety which increased rather than lessened as its end seemed to approach. A few minutes or seconds would now decide the whole issue, and the fewer those minutes or seconds became the more critical did they appear. The boat seemed to be coming in at a little distance from the point where it had gone out, and the crowd had moved off some way to meet it, but Olivia still stood rooted to the spot where she had stood at first. Perhaps if Mrs. Waters and Emmy had gone forward she might have mechanically followed them, but they too remained behind spell-bound and motionless.

The decisive moment had arrived. A few feet only intervened between the rowers and safety, but behind rose a huge wave which, if it reached the shore before they did, might even yet drag them back and engulf them. A film floated before Olivia's eyes, and for a while she could see nothing.

All at once the sound of voices burst upon her ear—a wild confused sound, at first, shaping itself as it went on into a cheer the longest and loudest she had ever heard, a cheer which the very sea and sky seemed to echo back.

The boat was being hauled up on the beach.

It was as though a load of lead had suddenly lifted itself from Olivia's heart.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, fervently, and drew a breath of infinite relief.

"Thank Heaven!" echoed a stifled voice at her side.

She looked round, and saw Mrs. Waters, who, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, stood leaning on Emmy's arm, trembling violently.

"Oh! mamma, dear mamma, don't!" entreated Emmy, who was herself, however, a good deal agitated. "It is all over now, you know."

But Emmy's attempt at consolation only made her mother break down outright.

"It is very foolish of me, dear. But—but it is so dreadful to see any one—to see people in such danger."

Olivia was silent; she felt somehow afraid of being overcome too, and for some time none of the three spoke. At last Emmy, seeing her mother grow more composed, cast a longing glance towards the throng of people collected round the returned boat.

"May we not go and look too, mamma?"

Olivia was quite grateful to Emmy for the suggestion. She had been two or three times on the point of making it herself, but had been restrained by an unaccountable feeling of shyness.

They moved in the direction of the crowd. But just as they had reached its outskirts there was a sudden parting in the mass, and a falling back of people on one side and another as though to make way. The ladies of course fell back too.

In the passage thus opened up there presently appeared something that was being carried along, shoulder-high, by three or four bearers. Olivia saw at a second glance that this something was a stretcher, improvised out of a couple of planks roped together, with a man lying on it.

She felt her limbs ready to give way under her. Who could it be? Was it possible that—but no; in another moment she saw Mr. Graham emerge from the crowd, walking by the side of the men who were carrying the stretcher. She was wonderfully relieved. It would have been so dreadful if he—the person who had been foremost in the act of mercy—had suffered serious injury by his generous heroism.

The little group with the stretcher was moving off the beach towards the village, and the crowd was beginning to disperse.

"What is the matter? who is hurt?" hastily inquired Olivia of the person next her, a large-boned shock-headed youth of very raw and rustic appearance.

"'Tis Evan Griffiths," answered the lad, with a loutish stare.

"Evan Griffiths?"

"Yeess. He's a-got an outlandish name like, 'cause he comes vrom an outlandish place."

"Is that the man they went out to save?" asked Olivia, bethinking herself of some expressions let fall by the old fisherman.

"The chap as were in the water? Yeess."

"And is he much hurt? Oh, what is the matter?"

"He's a-got his lag broke, drough the zide o'

the bwoat a hettin en like. They be a carryen of en to the infirmiry."

"His leg broken! poor man, how dreadful! And he is going to the infirmiry—oh! I hope they will treat him well and take care of him."

"Oh! they'll take care of en, noo year vor that. I heerd the gen'lman zay myzself as how he 'ud goo wi' en an' speak to the doctors vor en."

"The gentleman! The gentleman that went out in the boat?"

"Yeea, that's the woon."

Olivia looked after the little procession as it filed round a corner into the rustic High Street, and for a while kept silence, not trusting herself to speak. For she was thinking how brave and generous and considerate some people in this world were, and of how much more value to their fellow-creatures than a poor useless being like herself, who was only fit to stand by, meaning well but doing nothing. Ah! if she could only be of some use too, she who was so much envied for having more money than she knew what to do with— Suddenly she bethought herself of a way in which money might be made to do something towards helping the good work.

"And this poor man—this Evan Griffiths," she asked, turning once more to the boy—"he has others depending on him, I suppose. Is he married?"

"Oh yees! he's a-married."

"And has he any children?"

"I think there be dree o' em', if ye count the babby."

"Where do they live?" demanded Olivia, eagerly. "Here in the village?"

"No, no. They zed to, but they couldn pay the rent. Do live now zom'eres up Brookston way."

Brookston was a hamlet between two and three miles inland.

"Up Brookston way? Can't you tell me more exactly than that?"

"Where be Griffith's new house, Jimmy?" asked the lad of a companion who stood near.

"Where be Griffith's new house?" echoed the second youth, coming shuffling up at the question.

"Why, in Brookston, to be sure. I went by 'en yeesterday, an' zeed Mrs. Griffiths wi' my own eyes a-standen at the door like. Oh! I zay, woon't she be in a taken when she hears?"

"Woon't she? Ay, I nar thought o' that," said the first boy, scratching his head, and staring at his friend as though at the propounder of some great discovery.

"'Tis my consait zome woon ought to goo vor to let her know," rejoined the other. "She will be in a perty taken, for sartain."

"I'll tell ye what, Jim, I'll goo."

"An' I'll goo wi' ye," said Jim. "Come along, and let's zee who'll be vust."

"Stop," interposed Olivia. She felt that the self-appointed messengers, though probably good-hearted lads enough as lads go, were undertaking their task with a gusto which precluded all hope of delicacy or tenderness in the manner of its performance. "You are very good boys, but I am afraid— You shall show me the way to this poor woman's, and I will go and break the news to her myzself."

"You be a-gwayen yourzelf to tell her?" said one of the boys, in astonishment.

"Certainly I am," answered Olivia, firmly. "So I will say good-bye for an hour or two," she added, turning round to her two friends, who were standing a little way behind, where they could hear all that passed. "I will be as quick as I possibly can."

"Oh! Miss Egerton," cried Emmy, "surely you don't mean— All the way to Brookston— why, it will tire you to death. And it is coming on to be a wet afternoon, I'm sure."

"Yeea, that's sartain," said Jim, holding out the back of his sunburnt hand. "The drops be a-vallen already."

"You will get wet through," declared Emmy.

"I am afraid you will, indeed," said her mother.

"I dare say I shall, but I shan't mind that—it will do me good." And really Olivia felt as though the prospect of getting wet heightened her ardor in the undertaking; a little discomfort in the execution of her task would increase its value as a contribution to the good cause.

"There, I must be gone now, or I shan't be in time to be of any use, after all. Take your mamma home at once, Emmy dear; she is looking quite pale and miserable. Now, then, the nearest way, please."

Olivia moved off under the escort of her two guides. But she had not gone more than a few steps when she returned.

"Oh! Mrs. Waters, I forgot to say that—that you need not wait dinner for me, of course."

"But indeed we shall; we could not think of any thing else."

"Well, yes, just as you like—I shall be back very soon. And—and by-the-way, you will remember to keep my little secret for me, eh?"

"Your secret, Miss Egerton?"

"Yes, about the governess, I mean—I don't want any body to find out. You will both remember, won't you?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, Olivia rushed back to rejoin her guides, and Mrs. Waters and Emmy took their way towards their lodgings. As Olivia had observed, Mrs. Waters looked very much in need of rest.

"How wonderfully brave that Mr. Graham is!" said Emmy, after they had walked a little while in silence.

She had been pondering over the scene of the morning, and the remark had escaped her as a half-involuntary expression of genuine admiration.

"Ah! is he not?" returned Mrs. Waters, earnestly.

There was something about the words and the manner in which they were uttered which, rightly or wrongly, suggested to Emmy a feeling of personal gratification on the part of the speaker. In spite of the respect with which Mr. Graham's conduct had inspired her, she grew jealous again immediately.

"It does seem so strange that I should never have heard the name of Graham before," she said, presently—"never in connection with a friend of yours, that is, for of course the name itself— Here she paused with something of a startled air; she had just thought of a coincidence which at first sight did certainly seem rather curious.

"By-the-way, grandmamma Maxwell was a Graham before she was married, was she not?"

Perhaps because she was herself struck by the

coincidence, Mrs. Waters did not answer for a few seconds.

"Yes, dear," she replied at last, in rather an undertone. "But—but the name is very common up in our part of the country."

"Then this Mr. Graham is no relation of yours?" was a question that trembled on Emmy's lips. But when she tried to give it utterance she found that she had not the courage. It has elsewhere been said that there was a forbidden subject on which she had all her life been accustomed to curb her curiosity, and the force of this habit was still potent with her. And then, apart from all other objections, how could she speak words which would imply (for of course they could be taken in no other sense) that she suspected her mother of introducing a thief and a forger into the family circle under a false name and under false pretenses? However delicately she might put it, such a suggestion could not be other than an insult—an insult to her mother, who was the soul of uprightness and honorable feeling, an insult to the brave man who had that very day performed under her eyes an act of self-devoted heroism such as she had never before witnessed. And as Emmy came to this point, she felt as though she had already committed a crime in allowing suspicions so unworthy even to pass through her brain. So of course the treasonable question was suppressed; and, as almost immediately afterwards the threatened rain began to fall pretty heavily, little or nothing more was said during the hurried walk home.

Emmy continued in this penitent and self-accusing mood all the rest of the morning, so that by the time the usual dinner hour arrived, bringing with it the guest who had been invited the day before, she was much more frank and cordial than he had yet found her. She was sure she had done him great wrong, and was determined to make up for it.

"And how is the poor man?" she inquired, as soon as the first greetings and congratulations were over.

"Very much exhausted, of course, but the doctors seem to think he may do very well. I waited with him till the bone was set, and all was going on favorably. But—but I am afraid I have come rather early."

He accompanied the last words with a glance round the room as though he were looking for some one whom he missed. And yet Mrs. Waters and Emmy were both present.

"No," said Mrs. Waters; "we have been expecting you for some time. But we have put dinner off for an hour because of Miss Egerton—she has gone to see the wife of this Evan Griffiths and break the news to her, and, as it is a walk of nearly six miles there and back, I knew we should have to wait."

"A walk of six miles through this rain!" said the visitor, looking surprised and a little concerned as well. "And why—could not some one else—"

"Miss Egerton did not like to trust any body but herself," explained Mrs. Waters. "She was afraid of the poor woman being unnecessarily frightened, and really, if you had seen the two rough boys who were offering to go, you would have said there was some danger."

"Still, I do think," put in Emmy, "it was a

pity to go herself just when it was coming on to rain. She might have told the boys what to say, you know, and that would have done just as well. But that is always the way with Miss Egerton; she never cares for her own trouble if she thinks there is any good to be done. Oh! she is the dearest, kindest—"

Here Emmy bethought herself that there might be a risk of letting out more than she intended, and came to rather an abrupt stop. Mr. Graham, though he had seemed to be listening with some interest, did not say any thing to induce her to resume, and the conversation wandered off to other topics, Olivia's name not being again mentioned till she had herself made her appearance.

She was considerably longer in making her appearance than Emmy had expected. For Emmy had expected that, either forgetting the visitor's presence or not heeding it, she would on her return peep, as usual, into the sitting-room to report herself as she went up stairs. But when the door at last opened, Olivia entered, not in her wet walking-things, but ready dressed for dinner, and very well dressed too, with her rich masses of dark hair disposed in her most becoming style, and with no sign about her of having been out in wind and rain save the heightened color on her cheeks. Emmy thought she had never seen her look so well.

But, well as she looked, well as she was perhaps conscious of looking, Olivia did not enter quite with her usual self-possession. She appeared unwontedly nervous and embarrassed, and lingered for an instant in the doorway, as though she was not very sure whom to speak to first, or in which part of the room to take her place.

Her uncertainty was decided by the visitor, who happened to be sitting near the door, and who immediately rose to offer her a chair.

"Oh! thank you," she murmured, and glided forward to the seat thus placed for her. Here she found herself almost close to Mr. Graham, towards whom, after another interval of indecision, she raised her eyes.

"I must congratulate you on the good work which you performed this morning," she said, not without some appearance of effort.

"The work is yours quite as much as mine," he answered. "If you had not said what you did, I should have had to go alone, or not at all."

Olivia's cheeks grew scarlet. She had been quite tormenting herself during her walk about the incident of which he spoke, finding her chief consolation in the hope that people might have forgotten it altogether. Her behavior must have seemed so unfeminine, on the one hand, so absurdly and impotently mock-heroic, on the other!

"I—I hardly knew what I was saying," she stammered. "I was so excited that I felt as if I could do any thing almost, and I never thought how ridiculous I was making myself. If I had stopped to consider—"

"If you had stopped to consider, Miss Egerton, that man's life would have been lost, at any rate, and perhaps mine too."

She smiled, and shook her head, not knowing what to say. But secretly she felt very much relieved.

"And how is your patient going on?" she asked, presently.



Mr. Graham repeated the substance of what he had already told Mrs. Waters and Emmy, adding, before Olivia had time to speak again:

"You have taken a long walk through the rain to see his wife, I believe."

Again Olivia was a little put out. She would have preferred Mr. Graham to know nothing about her errand to Brookston; he would think she was always meddling.

"It would have been so dreadful if the poor woman had been told roughly or unkindly," she said, half apologetically.

"Was she in a great way about it, then?" asked Emmy.

"Yes, she was in terrible grief indeed. I could hardly get her to believe that things were not worse than they really are. And she seemed such a good, warm-hearted woman, that it made one all the more sorry for her."

"Poor creature!" said Mrs. Waters, sympathizingly. "And there are three children, are there not?"

"Yes, three quite little children," answered Olivia, recovering from her embarrassment in proportion as she became interested in the subject of Mrs. Griffiths and her family. "And they have been unfortunate in so many ways, poor things, without any fault of their own. The husband is a Welshman, and, though he married a Dorsetshire wife, seems always to have been looked on at Nidbourne as a kind of interloper; and then some months ago they lost a little trifle they had laid up by the absconding of the manager of a Savings Bank; and they have had to move—oh! almost every thing seems to have gone against them. And yet their poor little house is so clean and neat—it is quite touching to look at it; and the woman herself is such a good, gentle creature—"

"Mamma," interrupted Emmy, "I think you and I ought to go and see her. Will you take us there to-morrow, Miss Egerton?"

"Very well, dear. I am sure you will be very much pleased."

"Oh! I know that already," said Emmy. "Poor dear woman—I declare I feel quite interested in her. And she was very grateful to you for having taken such a walk on her account, of course?"

"She was very much obliged," answered Olivia, with a slight relapse into confusion, for she did not want this theme of her walk to be further harped upon. She paused an instant, considering how she might divert the conversation altogether from the subject of Mrs. Griffiths and her family, when suddenly she bethought herself that she was making an omission calculated to do the poor woman injustice in the eyes of her chief benefactor, and resumed:

"Oh! Mr. Graham, I should not forget to mention how gratefully she spoke of you and what you have done for her. I can't repeat half of what she said."

"Mr. Graham ought to come with us and see her too," said Emmy, graciously, for she felt that she owed their guest some amends for the coldness with which she had at first treated him. "It is a beautiful walk to Brookston, and if the day is fine it will really be quite a pleasant expedition."

"Thank you," was the instant response. "I should like to go with you very much."

"And then, Miss Egerton," continued Emmy, "while we are so near, you and I can go on to Brookston Mill and take that sketch we have been always wanting to do. Oh! it will be quite charming."

Dinner was just than announced, but before they sat down every thing was settled according to Emmy's suggestion, and an appointment made for Mr. Graham to call for the ladies after breakfast next morning, and let himself be taken to Brookston under their guidance.

In spite of the delay which Olivia's absence had occasioned, it was still comparatively early in the afternoon when dinner was over, so that a good many hours remained to be disposed of before the day should be at an end. These hours it was, moreover, necessary to spend in the house, the weather continuing such that a walk was not to be thought of. But somehow the time did not appear nearly so wearisome to the party assembled within doors as might have been expected, and as certainly Olivia would have expected could she have been told yesterday morning that she would have to pass so many hours in the company of a person who was then a total stranger to her. As it was, however, even Olivia did not feel it dull. Before the evening was over she had discovered, once for all, that Mr. Graham did not in the least answer to her preconceived notion of an Anglo-Indian, but was a man of taste and a scholar, with ideas of his own on music and pictures and books, and ideas which he could very well express. And even when he talked of other things than these, Olivia did not find him tiresome.

## CHAPTER XII.

### TO BROOKSTON MILL.

THE next day came, and brought with it weather little short of perfection. The storm had passed away and left no trace behind, save in the brighter green of the refreshed grass, glittering here and there with rainbow-colored drops, and in the deeper blue of the clear sunlit vault overhead. It was spring, and all surrounding objects shone through the purified atmosphere with the brilliancy of relief and color that spring alone can give. The spruce fronts of distant cottages or farm-houses shone like dazzling specks of whiteness dotted over the green landscape, and the little feathery streaks of vapor which flecked the face of the all but cloudless sky gleamed like snow-wreaths against the rich blue that glowed beyond. Altogether the day was one of those on which we seem to look at nature through a medium less gross and obstructive than usual.

The morning being so fine, it was evident that the programme suggested by Emmy on the previous day might be safely carried out; and Mr. Graham, calling at the appointed hour, found the two younger ladies fully equipped and ready to set out. The two younger ladies only, for the excitement of the day before had cost Mrs. Waters a severe headache, which, though she would not hear of Olivia and Emmy staying at home on her account, made it quite impossible for her to accompany them.

Perhaps partly in consequence of Mrs. Waters's absence, the conversation during the walk to Evan

Griffiths's cottage was much more stiff and artificial than it had been within doors the evening before. It is always difficult to take up an acquaintanceship at the precise point where its progress has been interrupted, and in this case the difficulty was increased by the presence of a semi-hostile element in the person of Emmy. For Emmy, in proportion as her admiring recollection of Mr. Graham's self-devotion became less vivid, found herself more and more disposed to revert to the old questions—Who was this Mr. Graham, and how came it that she had never heard of him before? Engrossed in these meditations, she was not in the mood for being so gracious to the visitor as on other grounds she would have wished to be, and he and Olivia were consequently left to carry on the conversation with little or no assistance. Thus thrown on their own resources, the two were very silent and constrained, speaking seldom, and then only as some subject of remark was suggested by the succession of external objects. And yet, tame and trivial as the discourse was, it somehow did not strike Olivia as being so, and this though she was usually peculiarly impatient of commonplace. But then the walk was so pleasant—now leading them athwart sunny fields with nothing overhead save the blue sky and carolling lark, now through shady lanes overhung with sweet-smelling May-blossom—one of the pleasantest, indeed, that she had ever taken.

In due time the party reached their destination—a tiny thatched dwelling standing by itself at the extremity of the straggling little hamlet called Brookston, and giving one by its very situation an idea of more or less forlornness and isolation. Here they found Mrs. Griffiths—a gentle, fair, pleasant-faced woman of the ordinary Dorsetshire type. She was this morning somewhat worn and haggard-looking, as though from want of rest, and yet was clean and tidy in her person, in spite of manifest poverty and the harassment of seeing after three little children, the eldest just old enough to run about and get into mischief, the youngest still an infant in arms.

Olivia's report had not exaggerated the poor mother's gratitude. No sooner did her friend of yesterday introduce Mr. Graham as the gentleman to whom she was mainly indebted for her husband's life, than she broke into a strain of passionate thanksgiving almost incoherent in its fervor, and not a little embarrassing to the person to whom it was addressed.

"You, sir, you—were it you? And me not to know it by only looked into your face! Ah! sir, the Lord in heaven's blessen be wi' you, and my blessen and the childern's, vor they shall learn to ask it vor you avore they learn aught besides—vor you and your wife and your childern, and every hair of all their heads."

"But I don't happen to have a wife and childern," said Mr. Graham, smiling at the flow of her eloquence, and yet apparently wincing under it too, and with an evident desire to bring it to a close.

"Haven't you? Then I hope you soon wull have, and worthy o' you, an' better than that I can't wish you. Oh! sir, forgive me if zoo be I zay mwore than I ought," she added, with sudden terror, as she raised her eyes to her benefactor's face, which a dark flush had overspread. "I wouldden offend you—no, not vor the world."

He smiled again—rather a forced, awkward smile, perhaps—but it reassured the poor woman wonderfully.

"I am not so foolish as to be offended with so good a wish as that," he answered; and though there was still something of stiffness and constraint in his manner, it might have been more easily taken for a touch of melancholy than of annoyance. Mrs. Griffiths was quite relieved, and was about to speak again, when he somewhat hurriedly resumed: "You have not asked yet if we have brought you any news. I called at the infirmary this morning, and your husband is going on as well as possible. He was asleep, or I would have asked if he had a message for you."

"Ah! sir, how can I ever zay how thankvul—But I never can, zoo 'tis noo use. And zoo thankvul as he is too, sir, to be zaved to his poor wife and childern. Vor I had a sight of en last night, sir, at the invirmiry—they couldden deny me when they heard how vur I'd come just vor woon look—and he were as calm and peacevul's a chile, sir, till I come to talk of you, and then he vell a-cryen, and they pushed me out o' the room and zent me hwoine in noo time. He ha' got a good veelen heart, sir, though I zay it that oughtn't, and vor all he comes vrom vurrin parts like, he ha' made as kind a husband to me an' the childern, and as zober an' hard-worken—Oh dear! oh dear! when I think of it all—"

She broke down in a violent fit of crying.

Mr. Graham looked at her compassionately, then, fumbling in his waistcoat-pocket, said, with a glance round the poor interior:

"I am afraid that while he is laid up you may perhaps have occasion to miss him in more ways than one. Will you accept this as a little assistance in the mean time—just for the present, you know."

And thus saying, he put a couple of sovereigns into her hand.

She looked at them through her tears with astonished eyes.

"What, sir! all thease money vor me! After what the dear young lady—"

She caught Olivia's eye, and subsided into an embarrassed silence. The fact was, she had yesterday received a present of no less than five pounds, but under so strict a promise of secrecy that she was afraid of offending her patroness irretrievably if she added another word. But she had already said enough for Mr. Graham to guess something of the truth—only something, for the idea that Olivia's liberality had been on such a scale did not occur to him for an instant.

Meanwhile Olivia, terribly disturbed at having been so near discovery, was casting about how to bring the visit to a close.

"Emmy dear, if we are to have any time for sketching at Brookston Mill we had better be thinking of saying good-bye. Oh! Mrs. Griffiths, can you tell us which is the nearest way?"

"What! to zee the view all the gentilevolks think zoo much on? Turn into the vields by the gate hard bezide our house, and then keep on by the hedge. And zoo you're a-gwayen already, are you—avore I've zaid a word a'most. But indeed if you stopped all day I never could zay words enough to show how I veel your kindness, sir, and yours, miss—a comen yeesterday drough the rain to zee me, you know," added the good

woman hastily, as she found herself getting once more on dangerous ground.

"Oh! never mind that," said Olivia, quickly. "And now, Emmy, really—"

Emmy rather wondered at her friend's impatience, but declared herself quite ready, and shortly afterwards the party, having taken leave as briefly as Mrs. Griffiths's renewed protestations of gratitude permitted, were once more on their way.

In spite of the hurry she had been in, Olivia did not finally part from Mrs. Griffiths till a minute or two after the others, having gone back to the cottage almost immediately on leaving it, under pretext of having forgotten something, but in reality to reiterate her exhortations to secrecy with regard to all donations past or future. On returning to the spot where she had left her companions, just at the entrance of the fields through which they had been directed, she found that Mr. Graham was politely waiting to hold open for her a ponderous five-barred gate which stopped the way. He was alone, Emmy having already strolled forward into the first field, where she was to be seen some distance ahead gathering flowers by the hedge-side. Olivia did not know how it was, but, on finding herself thus waited for, she became all at once very much flurried; not exactly disagreeably so, but still very much flurried.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, as she drew near, and in saying so she blushed, though she was not in an ordinary way a person given to blushing.

He murmured some polite generality by way of reply, then added, as she passed through the gate, which he still held open:

"I see you have been kinder to that poor family than you were willing to let us know."

Olivia faltered something about a "trifle," and blushed still more. The fact of Mr. Graham having found out something which she had not told Mrs. Waters or Emmy, seemed to establish a kind of secret understanding between them. And then, too, she was in trepidation lest the discovery might strike him as inconsistent with her character of poor governess.

"A trifle goes a long way sometimes, Miss Egerton. A few shillings to poor people like those are worth more than a few pounds to others."

She was relieved by finding how little he guessed that a few pounds were what she had actually given, and recovered sufficient self-possession to make the somewhat hypocritical answer:

"Every body ought to do what they are able, you know."

"A very good rule, if only every body was as liberal in fixing the standard of ability as you are. But there are some ladies of large fortune who perhaps would consider they were not able to give more in money than you have given, and I fancy there are none who would think themselves able to give so much in trouble."

Olivia was wont rather to pique herself on her power of parrying a compliment, but this time she felt as helplessly tongue-tied as a school-girl, perhaps because she was also conscious of feeling a sort of school-girlish pleasure in what had been said to her. She was naturally gratified to find that she had so entirely succeeded in keeping her secret. And this was not quite all that gratified her either.

By this time they had nearly come up with Emmy, who was still peeping and botanizing by the hedge-side. On hearing them so near, she rose and came eagerly forward, a bunch of flowers and ferns in her hand.

"Oh! Miss Egerton, see what a beautiful bouquet I am making up. These lovely sprays of double hawthorn—are they not splendid? But there is one flower here that quite puzzles me—look, this little white one. Have you any idea what it is?"

"Not the slightest, except that it is very pretty," said Olivia, examining a little flower which Emmy had pulled out of the bunch; "but then you know I am very stupid at such things. Here, dear, you had better take it home and show it to your mamma."

"Oh! you can keep it if you like; there are ever so many more growing in a little patch, and I am going back to get them. Walk on slowly, and I shall soon follow."

Emmy ran back to her hedge, and Olivia and Mr. Graham went leisurely forward. There was nothing said for some little time, during which Olivia kept bending her head over Emmy's flower with great apparent attention.

"Perhaps you could tell us what it is, Mr. Graham?" she said, at last, when the silence was beginning to appear irksome.

"I! You can not expect a man who has spent half his life in India to know any thing about English wild flowers. I should rather have thought you the person to apply to, living in the country, and—"

"Ah! if I had lived in the country always I should have been an authority, I dare say. But I was teaching in a school in London up to three years ago, and one has not much opportunity of studying wild flowers there."

"Teaching in a school! You have gone through such an ordeal as that!" and he looked at her as though a new phase of her character had been disclosed to him. "Why, that is a life which I have always fancied to be about the hardest and dullest and dreariest that can fall to the lot of any body."

"Well, there is not much excitement about it, certainly. Still I don't know that I found it so very dreadful as you seem to imagine."

"But you are better pleased to live with a pleasant cultivated family than in the most perfect of schools, surely? You are a great deal happier in your present life, are you not?"

He asked the question with an air of such solicitude that Olivia, with the fear of continued inquisition before her eyes, got quite nervous. How should she manage to keep her secret if he catechised her much further? And she was more anxious to keep it than ever. Still, with all this, there was mingled in her alarm a kind of gratification too. It was so seldom that she found herself, apart from her money, an object of interest to any body.

"Well, yes, I think I am happier in my present life," she answered, tremulously; and really, when she came to consider, there was no question that things went far more pleasantly with her now than they used to do. How would she have found time at Miss Lalande's for such a nice walk as this, for instance?

"You think! I should have imagined there was no doubt of it," he said, still with the same

appearance of solicitude. "There must be such a want of the ordinary interests of life in an artificial community like a school, whereas in a family, however small it may be—"

"Oh! of course in a family it is much more cheerful," assented Olivia, as briskly as she could. But, as she spoke, she remembered what a want of the ordinary interests of life she sometimes found amid the splendors of Egerton Park, and, bethinking herself that her normal state was more solitary even than he seemed to suppose, could not altogether repress a rising sigh.

She felt his eyes instantly turn upon her with keen inquiry, and positively trembled with alarm for what question might be coming next. But in another moment the glance was withdrawn, and when he spoke it was only to say:

"There is Miss Waters coming—a long way behind. Had we not better wait?"

Olivia acquiesced, and as Emmy, on seeing them waiting, came tripping up with accelerated pace, the awkward *l'été-à-l'été* was soon at an end. Surely Olivia ought to have been very much relieved. And yet, such is the inconsistency of human nature, her predominant sensation, on thus finding herself safe from further questioning, was something akin not so much to relief as to disappointment. She felt somehow ruffled and humiliated, as though a slight had been put upon her.

Of course she knew such a feeling to be very ridiculous, but for all that she was some time in getting rid of it, some time in recovering her full enjoyment of the sweet sights and sounds of the fair spring day. She continued rather silent and reserved until they reached the bare hill platform crowned by Brookston Mill, and there all tongues were loosed in admiration of the surrounding view—made up of glittering blue sea, grassy sheep-dotted downs, and an infinite succession of many-tinted fields which, further checkered by white villages and dark green patches of wood, stretched away into the hazy distance till the eye could no longer follow. The view having been duly admired, the next thing to be thought of was the choice of the best possible position for the intended sketches—a point requiring a great deal of deliberation and consultation. Here the ladies found themselves greatly aided by the taste and experience of their companion, who spared no pains in endeavoring to place them to the best advantage. By the time this important matter was settled Olivia was quite restored to equanimity, and she began her sketch with hearty goodwill, and a zealous desire of profiting to the utmost by the supervision of so good a judge as Mr. Graham. For she never doubted that he was going to watch the progress of the drawings.

But hardly has she made the first few strokes, when he said:

"I think I should like to spend an hour or two in exploring the country yonder; if you are sure I can be of no further use, that is."

"Oh! dear no," Olivia declared, and begged that he would not hurry himself to return; she and Miss Waters could easily go home by themselves. But even in saying this she felt the same vague sense of disappointment stealing over her which she had already experienced. She did not care a pin now whether her sketch turned out well or ill.

He thanked her for her consideration, and de-

parted. A minute or two afterwards Emmy remarked what a delightfully pleasant morning they had been spending, and Olivia assented as a matter of course. Yet, when she came to think of it, she hardly knew whether she had found the morning delightfully pleasant or altogether the reverse. It had been one of the two, or both, but really she could not say which.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### OLIVIA FINDS SOMETHING TO DO.

FOR a period of several days following the expedition to Brookston Mill, Olivia's impressions continued to be of the same dubious description. She was so unable to strike the balance of her feelings that she actually did not know whether the time was one of intense enjoyment or supreme dissatisfaction.

Certainly, so far as external facts went, she ought to have been enjoying herself. She was fond of an open-air life; and an almost uninterrupted spell of fine weather, now beginning to assume the character of summer rather than of spring, enabled her to spend more time out of doors than ever. She liked to feel herself of use, and in addition to Emmy's lessons, she now had the variety of an occasional walk to Brookston to see Mrs. Griffiths and take her news of her husband's progress towards recovery. Then, as has already been shown, she found Mr. Graham a very pleasant companion, and Mr. Graham was now a daily visitor. Taking every thing together, undoubtedly she ought to have found herself happy, and in a certain sense she did so—happier, indeed, it sometimes seemed to her, than she had ever been in her life before.

And yet all the time there was something unsatisfactory about her enjoyment—something of incompleteness and imperfection which went far to spoil it altogether. Every day she had one or more relapses into that undefinable sense of disappointment which she had twice experienced during the walk to Brookston Mill (it is unquestionably very disagreeable when a person whom you had imagined to be more or less interested in what you were saying suddenly turns off to something else); and as the time drew near for the break-up of the pleasant party at Nidbourne, this uncomfortable feeling became more and more settled. And really, when one considers how happy they had been there, it was only natural that Olivia and every body else should feel a little low-spirited at the prospect of leaving. For the same day which had been fixed for Mr. Graham's journey to Southampton was to witness the return of the three ladies to Chorcombe, where the Laurels had now been put into perfect habitable order. There had been some talk of Austin Waters coming down himself to Nidbourne to fetch them, and to spend a day or two in the company of his old friend, Mr. Graham; but to the great vexation of Emmy, who had fancied that her father's demeanor towards his visitor would certainly enable her to solve the doubts which she still could not help harboring, this plan was given up when the time came to put it into execution. Mr. Waters wrote to say that he found his personal supervision of the building operations at Chorcombe Lodge not to be dispensed with; and as

the tone of his correspondence had from the first shown the progress of the works to be a subject of paramount interest with him, even Emmy could not draw any deduction from this circumstance.

Thus time passed on, always increasing Olivia's tendency to dissatisfaction with herself and others, till at length the date fixed for departure was close at hand—so close that one fine afternoon in the latter half of May she found herself on her way to Brookston to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. Griffiths. She could not have accounted for it, but somehow on that day she felt more out of sorts and out of spirits than she had done yet. On the one hand, she was saddened by the idea of a pleasant episode of her life being so near its end; and on the other hand, she was depressed and humiliated by the profound conviction that in reality it had not been pleasant at all. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," was the moral which she found written everywhere—in her own heart, in the foliage of the lanes, in the sunny slope of the fields, in the glitter of the distant sea. For even the beauties of external nature, set off by the mellow light of the afternoon sun, failed to please her; and the now familiar landmarks of the way only reminded her, when she noticed them at all, how much happier she had been on the day that she had seen them first, walking to Brookston with the rain driving in her face and the wind whistling about her ears. She had not known at the time how much she was enjoying herself, but she knew it now—now that all the enjoyment was over, and only dust and ashes were left behind. Not that even in the recesses of her own mind she interpreted her discontent in terms so definite as these, but the words, if they do not express precisely what she thought, at least express with more or less accuracy what she felt.

It was necessary, at last, to make some attempt at rousing herself, her walk having brought her before the humble dwelling which was her destination. She tapped at the door, which after a short delay Mrs. Griffiths came to open.

"Good-afternoon," said Olivia, in the most cheerful voice she could command. "Well, I have come to bid you good-bye for the present. To-morrow is to be our last day at Nidbourne, and so— But dear me, Mrs. Griffiths, how ill you are looking! What is the matter?"

She had just noticed that the poor woman appeared quite changed since they had met last, three or four days ago—her pale, sunken cheeks, swollen eyelids, and general air of lassitude and languor seeming to tell a tale of bodily suffering.

"I ha' been a-veeling a bit dumpy like, miss, since last time I zeed you. I took cwoold two or dree days ago, I think, a-comen hwome vrom the invirmary where I'd been a-zeein' my poor maister—it come on to rain, and I got wet drough, and ha' never been rightly myzelf zince. Be pleased to zit down, miss."

Speaking thus, she crossed the room to bring her guest a chair, but with such feeble, tottering steps that Olivia was quite concerned.

"Take that one yourself, Mrs. Griffiths; this will do for me. Dear me! I am afraid you are worse than I thought."

"My head is zoo bad, miss," said the poor creature, sinking down on the seat nearest her. "I do hope thik woon idden all over wi' doust, miss, but I ha' done nothen to zet the place to

rights to day—what wi' veelen zoo weak like, and the childern to mind, you know," she added apologetically.

"What! the children to mind when you are so ill?" said Olivia, glancing at a corner where the two elder children sat on the floor by the baby's cradle, playing with an old set of battered wooden soldiers. "But you have had somebody to help you, surely?"

Mrs. Griffiths shook her head. "I'm in hopes I shall have to-morrow, miss; vor veelen zoo queer this mornen, I writ to my mother who lives wi' my married zister not mwore than an hour's journey by rail vrom Nidbourne, and I know she's sartain to come by vust train to-morrow if zoo be there's nothen wrong."

"She will not come this evening, then?"

"She woon't geet my letter avore the evenen, miss.—Ha' done, Bobby, let her have the zoldier back again, there's a good bwoy.—I hope you don't veel cwoold a-zitten zoo vor vrom the fire, miss?"

"Cold! Why, it is quite a summer's day."

"Ah yees. I vorgot, zoo it ought to be. But I ha' been zoo cwoold all day myzelf—it made me think you mid be cwoold too."

She drew her shawl more tightly round her, and shivered. Olivia looked at her compassionately.

"I am afraid you are really very ill. Have you not sent for the doctor?"

"I ha' had noo woon to zend, miss. We han't had a zoul near us all day except the pwost-man when I called him in to take my letter. Ah! I do veel zoo lwonesome like 'thout my poor dear maister—zoo lwonesome noo one knows."

"He will soon be with you again," said Olivia, soothingly. "But tell me exactly how you feel. Are you at all feverish?"

"I don't know, miss, but, but—" here the words were drowned in a burst of tears. "Oh! miss, you'll think me very wicked to take on zoo, but I can't help it. Vor I keep thinken of poor Mrs. Collins up the way that died last winter of typhus, and it come on just zoo, wi' veelen cwoold an' shivery. And oh! if I were to have en, miss, what should I do, wi' my husband a-lyen wi' his poor broken lag and noo woon to look to the childern, and they to catch en too, perhaps, vor they do zay as how it is zoo catchen, an' it went drough two or dree of the Collinses.—And oh! I never thought o' that, perhaps I'm a-given en to you this very minute. Oh! goo hwome, miss dear, goo hwome, please, or I shall never vorgie myzelf."

"I shall go home when I have seen you properly attended to, but certainly not before. Where does the doctor live?"

"Oh! half a mile up the rwoad nearly, in the gert white house o' the right-han' zide. But don't trouble about that, miss dear, it wull only take you out o' your way vor nothen. Goo hwome, do pray goo hwome."

"Yes, yes, all in good time. Let me see—the great white house half a mile up the road on the right-hand side. And now can you give me the name of some neighbor who might be willing to come and sit up all night with you and look after the children? It would never do to leave you by yourself till morning, you know."

The poor mother cast an anxious look towards the little ones.

"It mid be a good thing if zome woon 'ad come," she admitted, despondingly, "but I don't know who 'tis to be. You zee it idden long we ha' lived here, and we ha' always kept ourselves zoo quiet to ourselves like— There's Mrs. Cox just at the bend o' the rwoad wi' the honeysuckle avore the door—she ha' noo childern to mind but a big bwoy, and were very vriendly last winter a-comen to ask 'vor water when she were vrozen out. But 'tis noo good; I don't s'pose she would vor all that. No, no, miss, you goo hwome, and don't think noo more about it. I were a gert big baby to make sich a vuss, but the walken zoo many times back'ards and vor'ards to the invirmory, and the vretten, and the lyen awake o' nights ha' took all the strngth out o' me like. There, I'm a-veelen better already; 'twere all my vancy, I'll engage. You goo hwome, miss, there's a dear, and I'll tell you what, I'll goo to doctor's myself, the air 'ull do me good."

She rose with feverish alacrity, and, making a few hasty steps forward, put up her hand to take down a faded bonnet that hung against the wall. But before she had reached it she tottered, and would have fallen had it not been for the timely assistance of her visitor, who rushed forward and caught her by the arm; and even with this support she stood for a minute or two shaking and trembling so violently that Olivia feared every moment to see her faint away.

"You must go and lie down immediately," said Olivia, authoritatively, as soon as she saw her patient somewhat recovering. The poor woman still murmured something that sounded like an entreaty to "goo hwome," but was too conscious of her own helplessness to offer further resistance. She was indeed very ill—so ill that it was as much as Olivia could do to get her at last laid in her own bed in the next room. This having been done, and the invalid being made as comfortable as the humble means at command admitted, Olivia, having left the bedroom door open so that the mother's voice might, if necessary, keep discipline among the children, took her hasty way towards the doctor's house.

The doctor's house she had no difficulty in finding, but to her great concern the doctor himself was not forthcoming. He had gone out, she was told, on a round of visits, and was not expected home till late in the evening. She was greatly disappointed; but, as there was no other doctor in the place, all she could do was to leave a message begging that he might call on Mrs. Griffiths as soon as he returned, and then to hurry away on her remaining business.

She stopped presently in front of a pretty little cottage half overgrown with honeysuckle; and, having ascertained from a lad who was at work in the tiny garden that this was Mrs. Cox's, she went up to the door and knocked. Her summons was answered by a stout, comfortable-looking woman, evidently the mistress of the house.

"I have called to see if you would mind sitting up to-night with your neighbor, Mrs. Griffiths. She is very ill—much too ill to be left alone, and, besides, there are the children to look after. Do you feel inclined to come? It will be only for one night, for she expects her mother in the morning, and I will make it well worth your while."

Mrs. Cox's face brightened up wonderfully at the last words.

"'Tis very good of you to zay zoo, miss," she

answered, dropping a courtesy, "and like your kind heart too, vor I s'pose you be the young lady Mrs. Griffiths is always a-talken about. An' zoo she's ill—deary me, that's a bad job. An' what's the matter?"

"She seems so weak and tired out that I almost fancy low spirits may have something to do with it. But it is right to tell you that she herself is afraid of typhus fever."

Mrs. Cox's countenance fell perceptibly.

"Fever!" she repeated, and half mechanically shook her head.

"You will not go, then?" said Olivia.

"I'd do any thing to oblige a young lady sich as you miss, I'm sure," was the somewhat embarrassed reply. "But I were always mortal afeard of fever, as is but natural, you know, miss, when you think of the zight of volks he cars off, and poor Mrs. Collins only this very year. Zoo I'm sartin you woon't think none the wuss of a poor body, miss, vor veelen a bit shy like; and Mrs. Griffiths I idden know her vrom Adam till she come here zix months ago—an' she a-married to a Welsh chap and all; 'tis my consait woon of theasem volks ought to come and nuss her. You can't blame me vor not a-liken to goo, can you now, miss?"

"Oh dear no! I don't blame you in the least," said Olivia; "indeed, if I knew it was a case of fever I am not sure that I should have asked you. I am sorry, of course, but if you are really afraid there is nothing else to be said."

"I'm sure I'm zorry's any woon can be," said the woman, who, whether from genuine pity for her neighbor's troubles, or from reluctance to forfeit the young lady's promised bounty, did really look very regretful. "'Tis a hard case vor sartin; I don't zee how poor Mrs. Griffiths is to geat drough the night by herself if she's zoo ill—do you, miss? An' yeet, if noo woon 'ull goo to her, what's to be done?"

"Oh! that can be easily managed. I will sit up with her myself."

"Zit up wi' her yourself! But you be a-joken, miss, sure?"

"No—why should I be joking? I never should have thought of any thing else, only that I fancied you might be able to manage the children better than I could, and then I have friends at Nidbourne who are expecting me back this evening. And that reminds me, perhaps you could manage to get a message sent for me just that they may not be anxious. This is your son, I suppose?" and she turned towards the lad already spoken of.

"Yeess, miss, an' quite at your zarvice," said Mrs. Cox, eagerly, glad to find an opportunity of obliging a person whose generosity she had more than once heard praised by her neighbor. "Here, Tom, come an' show yourself," and Tom, thus adured, came sidling awkwardly up.

Olivia took a note-book from her pocket, and, tearing out a blank leaf, rapidly wrote a few lines informing Mrs. Waters and Emmy why and where she was detained, and promising to rejoin them on the morrow provided Mrs. Griffiths's illness should turn out to be non-infectious.

Having finished her note, she gave it to the boy with a few words of direction and a couple of half-crowns—a donation so stimulative of zeal that she had the satisfaction of seeing her messenger started on his walk forthwith under the

strictest injunctions from his mother to be quick and lose no time. This matter settled, Olivia prepared to take her way back to Mrs. Griffiths.

"It do vex me, to be sure," dolefully insisted Mrs. Cox, whom a little persuasion might probably even yet have induced to undertake the duties of sick-nurse for a sufficient consideration. "I'm ashamed to think of en, zoo I am—a lady like you a-taken sich a deal o' trouble."

"Oh! you need not mind about that, thank you; I shall be none the worse for the trouble, but all the better."

And so saying, Olivia turned and went blithely on her way. She was actually all the better already for what she was going to do, and felt so happy as she hastened along the road in the pleasant light of the declining sun, that, remembering the poor invalid who awaited her, she was almost scandalized at her own elation.

She made a brief halt at a little provision-shop on the way, and shortly afterwards, laden with sundry packets of tea and sago and arrow-root and jelly and other such luxuries, appeared once more in Mrs. Griffiths's little cottage. Here she found that every thing had gone on well during her absence; that is to say, the children had got into no mischief worth mentioning, and their mother, though still complaining of tremor and chilliness, was, if no better, at all events apparently no worse.

And now it was that Olivia set to work in good earnest. First, of course, she attended to her patient, compounding with the aid of one of the packets aforesaid a warm drink, which had no sooner been taken than it seemed to produce a wonderfully composing effect. Next, having done every thing she could think of to make the mother comfortable, she devoted her energies to the children. It was a long time before the children were disposed of. She had to give them their suppers; and then she had to prepare their night-quarters in a tiny up-stairs chamber which the cottage by good fortune contained, and where she judged that they would be safer from any possible infection than in either of the rooms down stairs; and then she had to undress them and get them to bed; and then, hardest task of all, she had to induce them to fall asleep amid their unfamiliar surroundings. When this was accomplished, and every thing was quiet above, she came down stairs again, and, finding to her great joy that the invalid had fallen into a doze, she passed noiselessly into the kitchen, where she found occupation for another quarter of an hour in trying to make things look a little tidy for the doctor. Finally, it being almost dusk, she discovered that she was a little tired and thirsty, and set about getting some tea for herself.

She had certainly worked hard for her tea, and deserved to have it in peace. But just as she had sat down and was in the act of pouring out her first cup, somebody tapped at the door, and she had to rise to open it. She was, however, rather glad than otherwise of the interruption, for she naturally thought that this must be the doctor.

She opened the door, and for a moment thought so still. A gentleman was there, whose face she could not distinguish, it being turned towards her, and away from the light of the clear evening sky without.

"Miss Egerton," said a voice she knew—a voice so familiar to her, and at the same time so

unexpected under the circumstances, that its sound set her trembling from head to foot.

It was not the doctor, but Mr. Graham.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### OLIVIA AND HER VISITOR.

ON recognizing in the new-comer Mr. Graham, Olivia was so much surprised that, fearing lest her discomfiture should be observed, she attempted an explanation.

"I—I did not know you at first. I was expecting the doctor."

"I hope I have not startled you. But I was with Mrs. Waters when she got your message, and it made us—made her—so anxious that—"

"I am very sorry," she stammered, for there was something in his manner that increased her agitation tenfold, "but—but there is nothing for her to be anxious about. I am making myself very comfortable, and—oh yes! you may come in and look if you like," she added as he made a step forward. "You see I am really very well off; this is a very snug little room, and now that my patient is asleep, I have nothing to do but to minister to my own comfort."

She spoke the last words with an attempt at cheerfulness and unconcern which she felt to be so clumsy that she was quite provoked with herself. But Mr. Graham was engaged with his own thoughts, and had not been attending.

"And you think of stopping in this place all night?" he asked, with a glance from her to the poor interior, and then back to her again.

"It was really a case of necessity," she said, apologetically. "I could not get any body else to come, and if you had seen how helpless the poor woman was—"

"But you said something in your note about infection. What is the matter?"

"She has caught a bad cold, and is very weak, and that makes her fanciful and low-spirited. I do not think it is any thing worse."

"Is she afraid of something worse, then?"

"It seems that a neighbor died of typhus fever last winter," admitted Olivia, reluctantly, "and she has taken it into her head that perhaps—"

"Miss Egerton, you must let me take you home at once. It is out of the question that you should expose yourself to such a danger."

He spoke more impetuously than Olivia had ever heard him, and she felt her heart swell with a strange sense of joy and triumph. But in spite of her emotion—emotion which she had much ado to conceal—she still stood her ground.

"You are very kind, but I must stay through this night, at any rate. There is nobody else to be had, and if that poor creature is really ill with typhus fever her life may depend on having some one at hand to watch her."

"But your own life—have you not considered that perhaps you are risking—"

"I have seen you risk your life in a much more dangerous enterprise," said Olivia, with a smile, but as she smiled she felt her eyes grow so dim that she was quite grateful to the friendly twilight which screened her from too searching a scrutiny. "You have been a thousand times more of a benefactor in this house than ever I can be; I won-

der you grudge me the pleasure of doing a little good too." She paused, warned, by a slight break in her voice, that the subject was not a safe one, and added hastily: "And really I don't believe there is the slightest risk in the matter. I think the case is only one of severe cold."

"What does the doctor say?" asked Mr. Graham, thoughtfully.

"The doctor!" said Olivia, a little put out. "Oh! the doctor has not seen her yet. He was out when I went to fetch him, and was not expected back till quite late."

"He is to call here on his return?"

"Yes; I left a particular message for him."

"Then I will wait till he comes. I should like to hear what he has to say."

Again Olivia was conscious of a thrill of pleasure. And so it seemed that there was, at all events, one person in the world to whom her fate was a matter of more or less interest without reference to money considerations! She thought it necessary to protest against Mr. Graham's giving himself so much trouble, but she was aware that she did so very feebly.

"I can not be content to go till I know whether it is safe for you to remain," was all he answered.

Suddenly a new apprehension occurred to her. For the first time she regarded the danger of infection as something more than imaginary.

"Surely it is very imprudent," she said, anxiously. "If it should really be typhus—"

"You seemed to be quite certain just now it was nothing of the sort," he replied, smiling. "But whatever it may be, you need have no fears for a seasoned old Indian like me."

She saw that all further attempts at dissuasion would be useless, and for some time remained without speaking, partly from an embarrassing sense of not knowing what to say, partly from a vague feeling of satisfaction with which silence was more congenial than words. Presently she remembered that, as Mr. Graham was waiting there on her account, she was bound to do what she could to entertain him.

"Will you not sit down?" she said, nervously—they had both been standing all this time. "And perhaps you will let me give you a cup of tea."

He assented and both took their places at the homely tea-table. And now there fell on Olivia a feeling of constraint and shyness greater than she had ever yet experienced in the presence of Mr. Graham or of any other human being. It seemed so strange to be sitting there pouring out his tea for him, at that little table, in that little room, with the subdued light of the evening sky and the uncertain flicker of the fire making every thing about them dim and unreal. She was at an utter loss how to bear herself, hardly dared speak lest her voice should not be under control, hardly dared raise her eyes lest they should meet other eyes looking at her. As Mr. Graham on his part seemed to be almost equally oppressed by the novelty of the situation, it need not be said that the conversation went very slowly and heavily. And yet somehow its heaviness did not particularly strike either of them.

"What will you do if the doctor pronounces it typhus?" asked Mr. Graham, after one of the long intervals of silence which were constantly occurring.

"I shall have nothing to do but to run my chance," said Olivia, as lightly as she could. "I can not leave the poor woman without a nurse in the middle of the night, you know. But I am so little afraid of it, that I don't think I should be liable to infection myself."

"No?"

"No; and as for carrying it to others, a few days of quarantine would make me quite safe in that respect, I suppose."

She paused and bit her lip. Might not Mr. Graham think that for a poor governess she was disposing very coolly of her time? She hastened to put herself right by adding:

"I should be very sorry not to be able to travel with Mrs. Waterd, of course. But I was not going direct to her house, so that it will not make so very much difference."

"Not going to her house!" he said, with an accent of surprise. "You are parting from her, then! But not altogether, surely?"

"Oh no! not altogether," faltered Olivia, for she was rather ashamed of the equivocation; and yet, if she wanted to keep her secret, what was she to do? "I—I—am going to spend a little time at home."

"Oh! at home!" he repeated, and was silent for a few seconds. He had never heard her speak of her home before, and felt, as it were, taken by surprise. "Is your home far from here?" he demanded presently.

"It is in Somersetshire," responded Olivia, nervously.

"In Somersetshire! Not very far from Chorcombe, then?"

"N—no, not very."

There was another pause, during which Olivia was considering how she might change the conversation, and Mr. Graham how he might elicit some more information on a subject in which he could not help feeling interested.

"It must be a great pleasure to look forward to, going home to your friends."

"I have very few friends—very few relations, that is," she answered, evasively. "Only an uncle and aunt and cousins."

"No nearer relations than these?"

"No; my parents are both dead, and I never had either brother or sister."

"That is being very lonely."

"Yes," faintly acquiesced Olivia. She knew not how it was, but all her strength seemed gone, and she could not say another word, could not even consider what to say—could only sit with downward-turned eyes and wait for what might be coming next.

There was a very long silence—so long that an invisible spectator who might have been present would have thought that the two had fallen into a kind of waking dream. And in truth, as they sat there in the gathering dusk, with the light from the window growing ever dimmer and dimmer, and the quivering shadows cast by the fire darker and more pronounced, a strange, dream-like influence made itself felt upon both, so that some (not all) of the actualities of the present were well-nigh lost sight of. The outlines of the poor cottage room and poorer furniture, blurred and blotted in the uncertain mingling of the natural and artificial lights, suggested to each of the two a scene widely different from the reality. Olivia could almost have fancied herself in a



certain little parlor in Egerton House where she was accustomed to take tea in the winter evenings, and which she had sometimes found so dull, so dull! but it did not look dull now. And Mr. Graham was half inclined to believe that he was back in his study in Bombay; only who was this that sat near him, filling the hitherto vacant chamber with a sense of companionship? It will be seen that the imaginations of both were in an unusual state of tension.

Still there was nothing said on either side. Once Olivia was aware that Mr. Graham turned towards her as though about to speak, and the flutter of her heart increased tenfold. But almost in the same moment she heard something like a suppressed sigh, and knew that his eyes were withdrawn again. The silence lasted some time longer—lasted till it became absolutely necessary that one of them should break it, and then Mr. Graham remarked what a fine evening it was. Olivia replied that the weather was really quite extraordinary, but, cheerful as the answer was, she felt the old chilling sense of disappointment creeping back upon her as she made it.

"I wish the doctor would come," she said presently; and indeed she heartily wished now that he would, though a few minutes ago she would have been content to wait for him forever.

"He is not later than you expected, is he?"

"Oh no! But it is such a pity you should be kept waiting, and really it is so unnecessary—"

"It does not signify how long I wait. I am not in the slightest hurry."

"You are very kind. I am afraid you must find it very wearisome."

"No, indeed, I—"

He stopped suddenly, and Olivia, to whom the energy of his manner had again imparted a momentary flurry, was left with a disagreeable sensation, half of pique, half of humiliation.

"I must see about a light—it is getting so dark," she said, not perhaps without a touch of petulance; and rising as abruptly as though she had only just made the discovery, she took down a candle from the chimney-piece. She had an idea that this would be the best way of breaking the spell which the mystic-glimmer of the fire-light had cast about her senses, and set about the simple business of striking a light with a feeling almost of defiance.

But she soon found that matters were nowise mended. The shadows conjured up by imagination had indeed vanished, but the reality remained, and was brought into more embarrassing relief than ever. As she put the candle on the table her eyes happened to meet those of her visitor; and the glance made her feel so shy and nervous that, on resuming her place, she hardly knew what to do with herself. She fussed for a minute or two over the empty tea-cups, arranging them with great mathematical precision on two corresponding bunches of flaring flowers coarsely painted on the gaudy blue tray; and then, muttering something about "work," drew a ball of cotton from her pocket and began manipulating a crochet-needle as energetically as though her very life depended on it.

Probably Mr. Graham was almost equally at a loss. He did not speak for some time, and when he did it was only to ask a question, in which he manifestly could have felt no manner of interest, as to what kind of work Olivia was doing.

"Why, crochet, to be sure!" said Olivia, with an awkward little laugh, which quite grated on her ear as she heard it—it sounded so affected.

"Are you really so ignorant as not to know?"

"I never saw it before, that I remember."

"Never saw it before!" and she tried another little laugh, but it turned out much like the former one. "Are the ladies in India so very idle, then?"

"I can not say what the ladies in India are. I know so little about them."

"What! after living there so long! That is stranger and stranger."

"It is quite true. I have seen more of ladies' society in the last fortnight than I had seen for nearly twenty years before—or than I shall see for twenty years again, probably."

Olivia laughed once more, but said nothing. There had been something in the last words which jarred upon her, and she thought to herself somewhat pettishly what a good thing it would be if that doctor would only come.

The wish was hardly formed when a heavy foot-step was heard, and an authoritative tap sounded at the door. The doctor had really come at last. And yet, oddly enough, now that he had come, Olivia felt as though she would rather that he had staid away a little longer.

Before the summons could be answered the door was opened from without, and the doctor made his appearance—a little, stout, brisk-looking man of middle age, who bustled in as if bent on making up for lost time.

"Well, well, my good soul," he began, cheerily, "and how—" Here, finding himself confronted by a lady and gentleman, he hastened to apologize. "Excuse me, ma'am, excuse me, sir—I really had no idea—"

Olivia briefly explained the circumstances under which she had found Mrs. Griffiths that afternoon, and then, not waiting to receive the litman's compliments on her courage, went into the back room to waken the poor woman and prepare her for the visit. In a minute more she beckoned the doctor into the back room also, and Mr. Graham was left alone, waiting not without some anxiety for the verdict.

He had not been waiting long when Olivia returned, with the doctor bustling after her.

"She will soon get well," announced Olivia joyfully, in answer to Mr. Graham's look of inquiry. "And there is no danger of infection whatever."

"The case is one of ague," said the doctor, magisterially—"ague complicated with derangement of the biliary and nervous systems. It might have been very serious if neglected, or in the absence of proper professional assistance, but with skillful and judicious treatment—oh! I don't doubt but what we shall bring her round in a very few days."

"And you are sure this lady will run no risk by remaining here all night?"

"Not the slightest, if the lady is so kind as not to object to the trouble. Let me see—" and the doctor pulled out a ponderous watch which he was fond of consulting on all occasions—"it is rather late for finding any body to relieve you, but—"

"But I don't want to be relieved, thank you. I am getting quite used to my duties now, and won't give them up to a stranger."

"Well, well, you are very kind, I'm sure—quite a good Samaritan, eh? And now I'll go home, if you please, and see about sending the medicine—once every four hours, you know. And you can give her a basin of hot gruel for supper as soon as you can get it ready—just to induce a gentle perspiration. Hum—my hat and gloves—I think I put them—"

While the doctor was fumbling about for his things Mr. Graham went up to Olivia.

"I think I had better leave too," he said, putting out his hand. "It is getting very late, and I have a long way to go."

"Oh yes! of course," answered Olivia, and put out her hand also. But though she was so ready to say good-bye, she felt a singular sensation of blankness and desolation come over her as she discovered that she was thus going to be left alone.

By this time the doctor had found his hat and gloves, and with a polite bow was preparing to depart. Mr. Graham followed him to the door, and both gentlemen passed out together.

The cottage stood a little way back from the road, so that they had a score or two of yards to go before they separated.

"Uncommonly good of the lady, to be sure," remarked the doctor as they went down the little field-path. "I don't believe you would find one in a thousand to do as much—that I don't. No joke to sit up all night in a place like that, you know."

"It is very kind of her, certainly," assented Mr. Graham, meditatively.

"Wonderfully kind, I call it," declared the doctor. "And equally so of you to allow it, of course."

"Of me!" said Mr. Graham, with a start.

"Yes, 'pon my word I think it is. But well, some wives deserve more of their own way than others, don't they? And now, sir, this is my road; let me see, which is yours? Down to Nidbourne, I suppose? Ah! then we must part company. A nice mild night for a walk, that's one thing. Good-evening."

"Good-evening," answered Mr. Graham, in rather a stifled voice.

"I hope you will get the lady back all right in the morning, and none the worse for her fatigues," and with these parting words the little man moved off.

It was a good thing he did not wait for a reply, for Mr. Graham found himself for the moment quite unable to make one. All his faculties had been suddenly thrown into unwonted turmoil, and for some time he stood rooted to the spot in a reverie which he could not shake off. Did the doctor think, then, that—that he and Olivia— And yet evidently the doctor thought so: what else could he have meant? What a strange mistake to make! and yet perhaps a natural mistake, when one came to think of it—there was nothing intrinsically impossible, or even improbable—nothing but what, indeed, under other circumstances—

He roused himself with a violent effort; time was running on, and he had his walk in prospect. But before setting out he cast one look back at the cottage. The night, though clear, was moonless and almost starless, and the little dwelling would hardly have been distinguishable from the darkness surrounding it but for a light which

showed through one of the windows. He knew that this was the window of the room where he had been spending the evening, and he took an unaccountable pleasure in gazing back on it and picturing to himself all that was behind it. Then again he roused himself, and turned his face towards Nidbourne.

The prospect was very gloomy and desolate. So much of the road as was visible through the darkness stretched before him in a dreary, monotonous line, bordered on each side with ghostly-looking hedgerows, and here and there with ghastlier-looking trees, which swayed and nodded with grim funereal motion in the night breeze. He could not forbear glancing round once more at the cottage window. The light was still there, glowing as brightly and cheerfully as ever, and seeming to send forth a friendly message of hope and gladness through the night. He half involuntarily made a step towards it as he looked.

He paused and again cast his eyes in the direction of Nidbourne, but again drew a step nearer the lighted window. Then for a minute or two he stood still and wavered, looking first one way and then the other, as though doubtful which to choose. At last, with what seemed to be a sudden influx of energy, he took his resolution, and with a step rapid and no longer faltering made straight for the cottage. The door was not yet fastened for the night, and lifting the latch gently he pushed it open and looked in.

He stood for a while motionless on the threshold, not pausing this time, however, in doubt or indecision, but simply because his gaze was riveted and he could not withdraw it. Not that anything was going on in that humble interior which to an ordinary observer would have been specially interesting. The invalid's gruel was being prepared, and the self-appointed nurse, her face turned away so that the features could not be discerned, was standing at the fire to watch it—nothing more than this. And yet he gazed as though that commonplace business of gruel-making had been the spectacle in all the world the best worth studying.

"Olivia!" he said at last, making a step forward.

He had got to think of her as Olivia by seeing that name affixed to some of her drawings, and just now it rose so naturally to his lips that he was in utter unconsciousness of having said any thing unusual.

She started violently, and looked half round, then let her eyelids droop, and with partially averted face stood in trembling silence before him. His return had taken her altogether by surprise, and yet evidently it was something more than surprise that agitated her.

"Olivia, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Her breath came and went so quickly that she could hardly stand. She stretched out one hand towards the chimney-piece to save herself from falling, putting up the other before her eyes with an involuntary attempt to conceal an emotion of which she was half ashamed.

In spite of her averted face, in spite of her eyes covered with her hand, there was something in her manner which inspired him with hope rather than fear. He advanced nearer, near enough to touch the folds of her dress, and, finding that she made no motion to avoid him, ventured to put his hand gently on that with which she still

grasped the chimney-piece. She did not withdraw it, and in another moment his fingers had closed round it with a strong, tender clasp—a more effectual support this than the chimney-pieces ten thousand times. He felt now that he had not hoped in vain, and yet he longed to hear his hopes confirmed by her voice.

"Won't you speak to me? won't you look at me—just one word, one look, to let me know that I may be happy? For my happiness all depends on you, Olivia, or rather I never knew what happiness could be till you taught me."

She turned her eyes towards him for an instant—only for an instant, for she shrank from letting him see the depth of gladness that was in them.

"Oh! Mr. Graham!" she murmured, and then stopped, unable to say a word more.

"Mr. Graham!" he echoed, reproachfully.

"Henry, then," she whispered, blushing.

She knew his name was Henry, because she had once heard Mrs. Waters tell Emmy so, and though the information was never repeated she had not forgotten it.

He put his arm round her—no fear of her falling now, though chimney-pieces had never been invented—and drew her close to his heart.

"My darling, my own darling, my wife!" and then he was silent from very excess of joy. When he spoke next it was to say, smoothing the glossy braids of her dark hair caressingly the while: "Let it be Harry, love, from you—that was my name when I had a home, and it must be my name again."

"Harry," she repeated, deliberately; but though she cunningly made it appear that she was trying how the word sounded, she had really spoken it for no better reason than because uttering his name was a pleasure to her.

"Do you not like it best too?" he asked.

"I think I do. But—but—"

"But what?"

"But then I should like best any name that was yours," she managed to answer, calling all her courage to her aid.

"Olivia!" he exclaimed, and acknowledged the compliment with a rapture that made her feel half guilty for having paid it.

Each of the two was so happy in the other, that by this time they had forgotten the existence of every thing and every body in the world beside, and there is no saying how long this pleasant oblivion might have lasted but for an untimely interruption which just then took place. A nightmare dream, sent perhaps for that express purpose by some malicious spirit, chanced to wake one of the children up stairs, who forthwith began to cry so lustily as to disturb not only the two other little sleepers above, but the invalid in the next room, whose voice was heard feebly demanding what was the matter.

"There, I am wanted," said Olivia, looking up into her lover's face with a bright smile, while with difficulty she disengaged her hand. "Good-night—no, you must not keep me another moment."

"I may wait till you come back," he pleaded.

"No, no, it may be an hour before I get them to sleep again, and it is so late—There, you hear!" (the disturbance still continued unabated)

"—I must really—good-bye—Harry." She did not know how she found effrontery enough to add the last word, but she found it somehow.

"Good-bye, then, but I will come to claim my treasure in the morning." As he spoke he detained her, in spite of her hurry, for one other instant, and then, releasing her all covered with blushes, tore himself away and plunged into the dark night without, only it did not appear dark now.

Meanwhile Olivia, having first looked in to say a friendly word to the poor mother, ran up stairs in great haste to restore order. But notwithstanding her haste, which left her no time for reflection, she knew without reflection that she was happy—intensely, ecstasically happy, happier than she had ever been, or had ever imagined it possible to be, in her whole life before.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ACROSS THE FIELDS.

THE morning sun shone brightly on Mrs. Griffiths's little cottage, lighting up as with the sparkle of a thousand diamonds the rustic window which last night had sent that friendly message through the darkness, kissing into fuller life the fresh spring foliage of surrounding trees and hedges, filling the air with the scent of wild flowers and the song of birds, and, in a word, making of the spot a very paradise upon earth. At least so the spot appeared to Mr. Graham, as he approached it this morning in quest of his betrothed.

He found Olivia liberated from her attendance in the sick-room, and ready to set out. Every thing had gone perfectly well since he had left her the evening before, a good night's rest having done wonders towards the patient's recovery, and this morning the expected relief had arrived in the person of Mrs. Griffiths's mother—a worthy old soul, whose gratitude to the gentleman who had saved her son-in-law's life, and to the young lady who had done so much for her daughter, was quite embarrassing in its effusiveness.

As soon as it was possible for them to get away without wounding her feelings, Olivia and her lover started on their walk, followed to the door of the cottage by the old woman, who continued to stand there as long as they were in sight, wishing them God-speed. Something of the inner joy which overflowed their hearts must have shown itself externally in their manner or appearance, for she evidently had a shrewd notion of what was going on.

"God bless you both, and make you as happy's you ha' made us these days, and a better blessen the parson himself woont be able to gie you."

The words made Olivia blush very uncomfortably, and yet on the whole she could not regret that they had been spoken. The good wishes of an old country-woman imported little or nothing, doubtless, in a philosophical point of view; but Olivia, walking from the cottage by the side of her future husband with that simple form of benediction sounding in her ears, could not help feeling that she was entering on her new era of existence under a fortunate augury.

The cottage and its occupants were left behind out of sight and out of hearing, and silently the lovers, quitting the road which had looked so dreary and monotonous the night before—not that it would have looked dreary or monotonous now—took their way across a green stretch of sunlit

meadow-land in the direction of Nidbourne. For some time they walked on without speaking, but more eloquent than any words were the glances which (accidentally of course) were every now and then exchanged between them—glances that dyed Olivia's cheeks with blushes half of shame, half of grateful joy and pride that knew no bounds. Never in her life had she looked half so radiant, never in her life had she felt half so exultant. So at last that which she had sometimes dreamed of, but never in sober earnest looked for, was a reality, and she was loved, loved for her own sake, loved by one so noble and good and generous that his love was the highest of all earthly honors. As she thought these things she would lift her eyes for an instant, and then, another accidental glance being exchanged (for she always found him looking too), would withdraw them again in great haste, ashamed that he should see how proud she was of him, and yet prouder of him than ever—prouder than ever of herself for the tenderness and admiration that his face had expressed. And her loving pride made her appear so beautiful—beautiful with a beauty far transcending that which any of her flatterers had ever tried to persuade her of—that the next time she looked she would find his face expressing more tenderness and admiration still.

"You do not regret what happened last night?" he whispered at last on one of these occasions, but the lover-like pressure of her hand with which he accompanied the question showed that he asked it rather to make a joyful assurance doubly sure than in any doubt as to the reply.

"Regret!" she exclaimed, and turned towards him a look so beaming that any amount of doubt must have dissolved under it; then in confusion she lowered her eyes again, and, partly to divert attention from herself, partly perhaps from a latent instinct of coquettishness, asked nervously: "And you—are you so very sorry then?"

She felt his arm steal round her for answer.

"Ah! my darling, if you only knew how happy I am—too happy almost, for I am afraid sometimes of waking and finding it all a dream. Thank Heaven, I know it is true, but when I think of the difference between yesterday and today, I can hardly believe that such difference can be—yesterday a poor lonely wretch with no idea of being other than a poor lonely wretch all my life long, and to day—" He did not finish the sentence, but folded his arm round her closer still.

"With no idea up to yesterday of—of any thing else?" said Olivia after a moment's pause. "Dear me! I am afraid it was very imprudent to make up your mind so suddenly."

The words were spoken in a tone of light railery, but she was inwardly conscious of a slight sense of pique as she uttered them. Had he never thought of her, then, before yesterday? And she had thought of him so many, many times.

Perhaps he divined something of what was passing in her mind, for he answered, apparently by way of explanation:

"I had made a resolution never to marry, and could not decide to break it till the very last. And I think I should have had strength to resist breaking it always, only that as I know I am not taking you away from a home of your own—"

"And supposing you had been taking me away from fifty homes?" put in Olivia, seeing that he came to an abrupt stop. "Have you such a

mean opinion of yourself, such a mean opinion of me, as to think—"

"I—I mean that—that—living in India, you know," he explained in some confusion, "it would be a sacrifice which I should have had no right—"

"But, dear me! living in India is no such dreadful hardship," said Olivia, still rather perplexed.

"I—I am obliged to live for months together in very wild places sometimes," he went on, gradually regaining his wonted manner, "and then I shall either have to leave you behind, or take you with me to some cramped little hut where you would have no single comfort that in England you have been accustomed to."

"I won't be left behind, at all events," said Olivia energetically.

He repaid the promise with a tender caress.

"My own Olivia! I would not be so selfish, but that I know it will be the care of my whole life to make you happy, and I believe that I shall succeed."

She smiled gratefully, but did not answer. She was thinking what a far different home awaited them in reality from that to which he looked forward, and rejoiced over her wealth as she had never rejoiced yet. Ah! what happiness was hers—to be able to reward his disinterested love with lands and honors, and yet know all the time that it was disinterested; to be able to place in a station worthy of him the man whom she was so proud of, and who had been ready to share his all with her supposed poverty! How surprised he would be to find that he had not chosen a dowdier bride, after all; and what pleasure she would have in making the announcement—such pleasure that she felt half tempted to forestall it by telling him at once. But she had already sketched out a little programme of her own as to the mode in which he was to learn the truth; and as this was neither the time nor place for putting it into execution, she resolved to keep her secret a while longer.

"You would much prefer England to India if it were not for your business, I suppose?" she said, following up the train of her own thoughts.

"I never shall live in England," he answered gravely.

"No, because it is necessary that you should live abroad—I quite understand that. But if it were not necessary, you would prefer England, would you not?—just as I suppose you would prefer reading books or writing them, to making railways and canals?"

"Oh! in that case, of course— But I don't by any means dislike my work, I can assure you."

"And yet I should have thought it was not at all the kind of work for which you were best suited naturally."

"So perhaps I should have thought myself once, but it was the only kind of work I could get to do at a time when I was obliged to do something, and of course I could not refuse it."

"You did not exactly choose it, then?"

"Oh, no! On my passage out from England I made acquaintance with a person who was on his way to India as an engineer, and as he was kind enough to offer me an opening, I accepted it. And now I have come to take an interest in the business for its own sake."

Olivia was once more silent, giving herself up to the contemplation of her own privileges. How pleasant to know that by her means he was to be released from work that was evidently only half congenial to him, and to exchange a life of exile and comparative drudgery for the ease and refined luxury of an English home! Again she felt tempted to confess the truth without further delay, but again on consideration could not bring herself to spoil the pleasure she anticipated from disclosing it later in her own way. If only there was no danger of his being in the least degree annoyed with her afterwards for the concealment! But that was surely impossible; he could not grudge her a few hours further possession of a secret which it gratified her to keep, and which, after all, was so infinitely inferior in importance to that other secret which she had allowed him to discover of her heart of hearts. Nevertheless she was disposed to find out if she could how far there was any possibility of her temporary reticence being distasteful to him.

"Is it not strange to think how much we seem to know of one another, and all the while how little we have heard of each other's history?" she said presently. "Why, you know absolutely nothing about me, except that you found me living with Mrs. Waters, and that my only relations are an uncle and aunt and cousins in Somersetshire, and yet—"

"I know as much about you as you know about me," he interposed somewhat hastily.

"But still wonderfully little when one comes to think of it. However, I suppose you feel about it much as I do, and that is, that when I know you so well I don't care about the string of dates and names and dry facts which would represent you best to other people."

He did not speak for a few seconds, and then it was with a voice which showed how deeply this testimony of her love had moved him.

"Olivia! You can really put so much faith in me as that?"

"Can't you put as much in me, Harry?"

His only reply was a look of ineffable tenderness.

"You are not going, then, to be a dreadful jealous tyrant, always trying to find out my secrets, if I have any?" she went on.

"My own treasure! I have found out already that you are worthy of all love and all trust, and what do I care for finding out more?"

"Ah! then I see you really feel towards me as I feel towards you," she said, with a shy yet loving glance upward. His face happened to be turned away, so that he did not see the glance, but his manner gave sufficient acknowledgment of the words which had accompanied it.

There was a momentary pause, and then, with his face still averted, he asked, in rather low tones:

"You mean to say that if I had a secret to keep from you, you would love me all the same and trust me to keep it still?"

"Ah! would I not, Harry? One secret or a thousand."

He did not answer save by a long-drawn breath, but she knew by his very silence how glad he was made by this declaration of her confidence, and therefore of her love.

In the exchange of lover-like assurances such as these, and in discussions of a more practical

but no less agreeable nature as to the arrangement of that future which they were henceforth to have in common, the pleasant morning walk was made to look very short. Thus, almost before they knew whither they were going, they found themselves at the door of the house which Olivia for the present called home, where, having made an appointment for another meeting later in the day, when the relations between them should have been made known to Mrs. Waters and Emmy, they parted—Mr. Graham to return to his lodgings, Olivia to go up stairs to her friends and give the best account of herself that she could.

She never knew exactly how she got through her task. Mrs. Waters, who fortunately was alone in the drawing-room when she entered it, began asking a multiplicity of questions—as to how she had passed the night, as to the state in which she had left Mrs. Griffiths, as to the effect of so much fatigue upon herself—and then somehow the conversation got round to Mr. Graham. And presently Olivia found herself sitting on the sofa with her hand fast locked in that of her friend, trembling and blushing and stammering in a manner utterly inconsistent with her supposed claims to superior strength of character, and giving up her confession piecemeal in reply to interrogations from which she shrank even while she invited them. At last, gradually, and by dint of a great deal of cross-examination and hypothetical filling up of hiatuses, Mrs. Waters was put in possession of the three great facts that Mr. Graham had said he loved Olivia, that Olivia loved Mr. Graham, and that the two were to be married as soon as might be.

Olivia was prepared to be warmly congratulated, but she had hardly expected from a person so comparatively undemonstrative as Mrs. Waters usually was the display of affectionate tenderness with which her tidings were received. No sooner did Mrs. Waters fairly understand what had happened than she drew Olivia towards her with a fondness which took her by surprise even in the midst of her emotion.

"Dear, dear Olivia—" it was the first time that Mrs. Waters had ever called the heiress by her Christian name. "God bless you—God bless you both!"

"Dear Mrs. Waters!" responded Olivia gratefully, "how kind and good you are! more like a mother to me than any thing else—or a sister, I ought to say," she added, bethinking herself that this was the most complimentary way of putting it.

A short silence ensued, and then Olivia spoke again.

"Then you quite approve of my choice?" she asked with downcast eyes, but she put the question rather because she wanted to hear the praises of her betrothed than because she had really any doubt on the subject.

"Ah yes! Olivia—I am sure nobody could make a better one," answered Mrs. Waters, with even more warmth than her friend had expected. "So—so far as I know, of course I mean."

"And what you don't know of him I do," said Olivia proudly. "I know that he has chosen me believing me to be a poor governess with no home of my own, or chance of a home but through his generosity; I know that he is the most noble, disinterested— And that reminds me, dear Mrs.

Waters, Egerton Park and all about it must be kept secret a little longer."

Mrs. Waters looked rather dismayed.

"What! does he not know yet—"

"No, and I don't intend him to know until we get to Chorcombe. I forgot to tell you; it is settled that he is to go with us to Chorcombe for a few days, only a few days for the present—at least so he thinks, but I hope the discovery of Egerton Park may make a difference. In the mean time he says he must return to India by this mail, just as if—as if nothing had happened, you know; only he is going by Marseilles instead of Southampton, and that will give him a little more time. So you will ask him to stay two or three days at the Laurels, won't you, Mrs. Waters dear? He thinks I am to be at the Laurels too."

"But have you really not told him yet? Oh! Olivia—Miss Egerton—I am afraid—"

"Why, what is there to be afraid of? If he thought I was good enough for him when I was a poor dependent he won't change his opinion when I am a rich lady, surely? If it had been the other way indeed, and he had been another man— But at all events you won't betray me, now that the mischief is done and can't be undone?"

"Oh! of course I will do just what you wish," said Mrs. Waters with a feeble smile, but in spite of the smile, she still looked so uncomfortable that Olivia was quite puzzled.

But Olivia had soon something else to think of. Emmy came into the room at this juncture, and it was necessary that the event of the day should be made known to her also.

When her mother told her that Miss Egerton was engaged to Mr. Graham, Emmy looked more surprised than ever she had looked in her life before. She was so much surprised that it was some time before she recovered herself sufficiently to offer her congratulations to Miss Egerton as in duty bound. And somehow, when she did offer them, though she tried to make them as cordial as possible, she was aware that she did not succeed nearly so well as she would have done if Miss Egerton's choice had fallen on almost any body else. The fact was, she had never quite got over her original prejudice against Mr. Graham.

And yet it was surely very foolish to harbor any remnant of that prejudice now, and so she acknowledged to herself when she came to think the thing over. She had only had one reason for ever feeling the faintest distrust of Mr. Graham, whom personally she liked rather than otherwise; and that reason was founded on a suspicion the groundlessness of which she might now regard as all but absolutely demonstrated. Miss Egerton was going to marry him, and certainly her mother would not stand by silently to see her unsuspecting friend united to a felon—not if he were ten times her brother. So there was obviously an end of the matter, and the sooner all recollection of her silly prejudice was got rid of the better.

Thus Emmy concluded; but, in spite of her conclusion, she could not help feeling rather curious to see whether her father would be as willing to extend hospitality to the stranger as her mother had been.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE NEW HOME.

On the afternoon of the following day three ladies and a gentleman alighted on the platform of the rustic little railway station which gave Chorcombe a right to consider itself part of the great system of European civilization. The travellers had left Nidbourne that morning, and were no other than Mrs. Waters and Emmy, Miss Egerton and Mr. Graham, the last of whom had been duly invited to spend a few days at the Laurels, according to Olivia's proposal.

Immediately on leaving the train both Mrs. Waters and her daughter looked round with a half-expectation that Austin might be waiting to receive them. They soon saw that this was not the case; but before they had time to feel disappointment, a very tall footman, with powdered head and large white calves, advanced with every mark of profound respect to inquire if the ladies were Mrs. and Miss Waters. They duly answered the question, though in considerable astonishment, when, to their infinitely greater astonishment, he instantly possessed himself of their cloaks and travelling-bags, with the explanation:

"I will put them in the carriage, madam."

And, looking the way which he seemed to indicate, they saw just outside the station door a gorgeously panelled open carriage, drawn by a couple of bright bays with proudly arched necks and glossy coats that seemed to fling back the sunshine. As this splendid vision burst on Emmy's gaze, she could hardly persuade herself that it was not all a dream.

But it was no dream, and, following the obsequious footman with the cloaks, all four travellers went forward, and had presently taken their places in that sumptuous equipage in as matter-of-course a style as though none of them had ever been accustomed to any thing meaner. All four travellers, for, by private compact with her friends, Olivia, instead of going straight to Egerton House, was to accompany them home to dinner at the Laurels, where Austin had that morning been informed by a letter from his wife both of Miss Egerton's incognito and the reason for it.

Who shall say with what feelings Emmy leaned back on the cushioned seat of the carriage—her own carriage, or at least the carriage which ever hereafter was to be at her command?—who shall say with what new balminess the breeze played upon her cheek, with what new radiance the sun lighted up every thing on which her eyes fell? As she found herself borne in luxurious motion through the streets of her native place, she could hardly believe that they were the same which she had known formerly, so unfamiliar did they appear as seen from her present unaccustomed elevation. Perhaps it was something more than the mere change of material point of view which made them look so strange, for she had driven through them once or twice in Miss Egerton's carriage without observing any particular difference; but it did not occur to her to make this reflection now—she could only marvel, without trying to account for it, at the alteration which seemed to be in all things and all people. Nowhere did this alteration strike her so much as in the part of the village which she knew best—the street where she had been born, and where she had lived all her life until within the last few

weeks. As she recognized the shabby little house which had been her home so long, she could hardly believe that it was the same, could hardly imagine it possible that she and those belonging to her had really lived in such a place—a place of which she felt so ashamed that she fervently hoped its history might be unknown to the magnificent footman behind, and the no less magnificent coachman in front. And yet, as she could not help remembering with a pang of something like self-reproach, she had been very happy in that place sometimes—in those far-off days (how far-off they looked now!) when she and her mother sat sewing at the window on sunny afternoons, and sometimes on half-holidays would see—

Why, who was this coming round the corner? Was it—yes—no—yes, it was; and he saw her—he was bowing—and of course she too—And Emmy made a little inclination of the head to a person who was just raising his hat towards the carriage, and whom in another moment the flying wheels had borne her swiftly past.

Yes, actually that had been John Thwaites. Dear me! Emmy glanced round at the three other occupants of the carriage, and, finding that they were all busy with their own talk in evident ignorance of the encounter, she heaved a slight sigh behind her parasol. Poor John Thwaites! She could fancy he looked a little paler and thinner than he used to do—ah! she knew what that would be owing to. And what a depressed melancholy look there had been in his eyes as the carriage went whirling past him!—yes, the carriage must have reminded him anew of the distance that separated her—ah well!—and she sighed again. For of course he must have known it was their own carriage; he could never be so stupid as to think any thing else, surely. Unless indeed he might have taken it into his head that it was Miss Egerton's, as she was with them—it was very provoking really that Miss Egerton had not ordered her own carriage like other people. But then it was quite impossible he could have made so silly a mistake. Dear! dear! to think of meeting him for the first time for so long, and under such circumstances too! It was very strange—so strange that Emmy could do nothing else than ponder on it all the rest of the way.

They had passed through the village, and had gone some little distance beyond it, when she was roused at last by the stopping of the carriage before a handsome gate, belonging, as she knew, to the house which in the mean time was to be her home. As the gate swung back on its hinges to admit them, disclosing the hitherto unknown land beyond, she looked up with new interest in external objects, while John Thwaites once more retreated far into the background.

It was a handsome place, this temporary new home of hers—quite handsome enough to distract the thoughts of one so little accustomed to grandeur as Emmy. A broad gravelled carriage sweep, with shrubs and flower-beds on one hand and a spacious lawn on the other, led up to the house—a white-stuccoed, dashing-looking dwelling of the kind described in Mr. Jupp's list as a very superior gentlemanly villa residence. As the carriage-wheels sounded on the gravel, the door of the house was thrown open, and Emmy, looking eagerly towards it for her father, saw, not him, but another resplendent creature with

powdered head and large white calves, and three or four smart maid-servants clustering behind. No wonder indeed if she felt very much elated.

She was so much elated that she forgot to look again for her father, until, having been duly assisted to alight, she stood with her fellow-travellers in the handsomely proportioned hall.

"Papa is quite well, I hope?" she asked one of the white-headed footmen, as she gazed round in wondering admiration, with which some surprise at her father's absence now began to be mingled.

"Master is quite well, thank you, miss. Master is in the library, I believe."

Emmy was just going to ask where the library was when a dark-grained door painted in imitation oak was slowly opened, and Austin Walters appeared on the threshold.

He stood looking at the group with a doubtful, almost bewildered, air, and without seeming to observe Emmy, till, unable to restrain her impatience, she made a step forward and threw herself on his neck.

"Good child! good child!" he muttered, holding her for a moment in his arms; then, releasing her, he advanced to bid welcome to the rest.

Mr. Graham was standing a little apart from the others, but, somewhat to Emmy's surprise, her father went up to him first.

"How do you do, Mr. Graham?" but Emmy observed in his manner a singular want of his accustomed geniality.

The host and guest shook hands, and Emmy expected that her father would immediately turn to greet Mrs. Waters and Olivia. But he still remained standing before Mr. Graham almost as though he had no eyes for any body else.

"I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

"Very pleasant indeed. Oh! Mrs. Waters, I beg your pardon."

With this Mr. Graham stepped aside to make way for his hostess, and Austin, thus reminded, went forward and pressed his lips on his wife's cheek, after which he turned to give a welcome to Miss Egerton. Then he looked towards Mr. Graham again, and stood silent, with something of the same bewildered air as before.

"I am really very glad you have had a pleasant journey," he said at last.

Mr. Graham again declared that he had enjoyed the journey very much, and then there was another constrained pause. It was evident to Emmy that her father, though not willing to wound his guest's feelings by open neglect, was not altogether at ease with him.

"Shall I show the gentlemen up to his room, sir?" asked one of the footmen, coming opportunely to the rescue.

"Ah yes! to be sure," said Austin, rousing himself. "Shall they show you up to your room, Mr. Graham? let me see, it only wants about three-quarters of an hour to dinner-time."

Mr. Graham acquiesced; and as Mrs. Waters (in whose manner also a shade of constraint had been visible) turned to Olivia and said that they had better be thinking of going up stairs too, the little assembly was quickly broken up. Emmy, however, still remained below. She wanted to exchange further greetings with her father, and perhaps she was not averse to the idea of finding out, if she could, something about Mr. Graham. But even the subject of Mr. Graham waned in

interest as she looked round at the glories of her new home.

"Oh! papa," she exclaimed, following him into the Turkey-carpeted room called the library, "how lovely every thing is! how—"

She stopped short, a little disconcerted, for she had just discovered that they were not alone. At a table covered with papers in the middle of the room there sat, busily writing, a dapper rosy-checked personage, whom a second look showed her to be Mr. Tovey the architect.

He rose immediately on seeing the young lady of the house, and bowed with much courteous gallantry of manner.

"Miss Waters! Allow me to congratulate you on your return. You were pleased with Nidbourn, I hope?—ah! so glad that my humble recommendation proved satisfactory. I need not ask if you found the sea-breezes beneficial, for upon my word—" and he rounded off the sentence with another bow of extra politeness. "And might I ask how you find things looking down here, Miss Waters? The arrangements of the house and grounds—considering, you know, that they are only to subserve a temporary purpose—I hope they meet your approbation?"

"Yes, every thing is very nice indeed," said Emmy, looking round with the air of temperate admiration which she felt it incumbent on her to assume in the presence of a stranger, even though a stranger so much behind the scenes as Mr. Tovey. "What a pretty room this is—the library, I think?"

"Ah yes! pretty enough," said Mr. Tovey lightly, "pretty enough. But no more to be compared with the library we are going to give you at Chorcombe Lodge, Miss Waters—ah! no more than chalk to cheese, it is now, sir?"

"Oh! certainly not," said Austin, shaking himself out of a brief fit of abstraction. "Yes, I think we are making a very neat job of that library, Mr. Tovey."

"Yes, and what's more, sir, we are making a neat job of the whole house, from cellar to garret," rejoined Mr. Tovey enthusiastically. "Ah! Miss Waters, I do promise myself a treat in showing you over that house when it is sufficiently advanced—I do indeed. In my opinion, it will be quite one of the half-dozen finest places in the county."

"The largest room is to be more than a hundred feet long," put in Austin, catching some of Mr. Tovey's fire, and speaking more like himself than Emmy had yet heard him speak that day. "More than a hundred feet long—only think of that! and lighted by three magnificent chandeliers which I am going to get made on purpose. That is to be for extra occasions—of course, such as a ball or a very large dinner-party, but for ordinary use we shall have eight smaller reception-rooms, all equally—"

"And when is it all to be finished, papa?" delightfully interrupted Emmy, laying aside her dignity in her impatience to realize visions of so much magnificence.

"Mr. Tovey thinks we shall perhaps be able to move into it in the course of next winter."

"Next winter!" cried Emmy, looking rather blank.

"There is a very great deal to be done," said Mr. Tovey blandly. "The furnishing alone, you know—"

"Ah yes! the furnishing, to be sure," said Emmy with a resigned sigh. "And will it keep you as busy all the time, papa, as it has done for the last six weeks? because, if it does, that will be very tiresome. We were dreadfully disappointed that you could not come down to us for a few days—the sea-side was so beautiful, and would have done you so much good. Why didn't you come, papa?"

"I assure you it would really have been impossible. We have been so very busy all the time, have we not, Mr. Tovey?"

"I don't see what there is to keep you so very busy," pouted Emmy. "And it is my belief, papa, you wanted a change more than we did. I declare, you are looking quite pale and thin."

"Oh! that is nothing, nothing—a little worried to-day, that's all—there, we won't say any more about it; I am all right again now. And so you don't understand what there is to keep me so very busy, you were saying. Shall I tell you something, Emmy?"

"Oh! papa, what?" said Emmy excitedly, a certain mysteriousness in her father's manner arousing all her curiosity.

"I have news for you, Emmy. I wouldn't write any thing about it because I wanted to surprise you when you came home. What do you think, child? I will give you three guesses if you like—but it is no good, you would never find out. I have bought the Beacon Bay estate."

"The Beacon Bay estate, papa?"

"Yes, child, the Beacon Bay estate. So the harbor and the pier and the wharves, and all the new town that will spring up—to say nothing, of course, of the fashionable hotels and lodging-houses at the west end—every thing will be my property. What do you think of that?"

"It is quite true, Miss Waters," said Mr. Tovey, answering Emmy's look of astonishment.

"In a few years your father will be the richest man in Great Britain, or if not quite the richest (for I don't like to exaggerate), among the two or three richest men—or the half-dozen richest, say."

"In a few years, Mr. Tovey!" repeated Austin, with a slight touch of discontent in his voice.

"Yes, but in a few months you know—"

"In a few months the thing will virtually be done," agreed Mr. Tovey. "In a few months the railway will have been definitely decided on, and your interest in the property will be worth almost any money."

"And mind you, Emmy, the railway is as good as made already," interposed Austin eagerly. "Not the slightest danger on that score, is there, Mr. Tovey?"

"Danger!" echoed Mr. Tovey, with all the genuine ardor of a sanguine temperament. "With such a strong party as there is on the Board, I should like to see how there can be danger."

"Of course, of course, just what I say myself. Well, Emmy, you know now what has been making me so busy, and what do you think of it? Better to be a little tied for the present, for the sake of coming out so splendidly as that, eh? Duty first, and pleasure afterwards—yes, that's the way to look at it."

"Oh! decidedly, papa," assented Emmy cordially. "And when once the railway is made—"

"When once the railway is made we shall have nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves. By that time the town will be half laid out, and— But



I haven't shown you the plans yet; look here"—and, drawing forth some huge sheets of paper from the mass of documents on the table, Austin proceeded to display them before his daughter's amazed eyes. "Let me see, which is this? Oh yes! 'Bird's-eye View of Waterston'—Waterston is to be the name of the new town, you know—aha! what do you say to that? This is just to give a general idea of the place, you perceive—with the pier and harbor at the east, and the parade and fashionable terraces to the west, and a broad handsome street running across to connect them—Agnes Street, and another street a trifle narrower behind that again—Emily Street. Do you like it, eh? And then here is 'Marine Parade, Waterston,' and here is 'Plan of New Church, Waterston,' and here is 'Design for Royal Crescent and Royal Hotel, Waterston'—hotel in the middle, you see, and crescent curving round on each side. A beautiful effect that crescent will have, to be sure—I was over yesterday to look at them digging the foundations."

"What! papa, they have actually begun already?"

"Only just on the Crescent for the present. You see it is a great point to have some decent accommodation ready for visitors by the time the railway is finished, so as to be beforehand with all neighboring proprietors, and, as Mr. Tovey says, bricks and mortar never run away. Well, you will give your blessing to the new town, won't you, Emmy?"

"Oh! papa, what a charming new town it will be!" cried Emmy enthusiastically, her excitement quite causing her to forget the restraint of Mr. Tovey's presence. "What a beautiful place they are going to make of it! and what a capital idea to call it Waterston! and how funny it will be to hear the word from other people, and yet so pleasant all the time too! It sounds quite like the name of a place that a lord might take his title from, doesn't it now, papa?"

There is no knowing how much longer Emmy might have gone on had she not just then been interrupted by the deep stroke of a gong that sounded through the house.

"That means that you have just half an hour to dress for dinner," said her father, with an affectionate smile which showed how much her expressions of approval had gratified him. "So perhaps you had better run up stairs to your room—I will ring for somebody to point it out to you—and Mr. Tovey and I will try to finish a little calculation we are making here. Good-bye, child; I am so glad you are pleased, but indeed I knew you would be."

Thus dismissed, with the further tribute of a loving squeeze of the hand from her father and a profound bow from Mr. Tovey, Emmy left the room, and went up the broad stone staircase, preceded by a lady-like lady's-maid in black silk and lavender-colored ribbons to show her the way. She felt like a queen going to her tiring-room.

ness of solid plate and best cut glass, or even to the awful presence of the two white-headed footmen, moving noiselessly about the room with the solemnity of officiating priests. These causes doubtless counted for something in the general effect, but more oppressive than any of them was a certain unwonted frigidity and constraint visible in the manner of the master of the house, and more especially visible when he addressed his guest, Mr. Graham. Not that he had any apparent intention of treating Mr. Graham with coldness or disrespect. On the contrary, he was constantly turning to speak to him, to the neglect of every one else at table; but this very civility only brought all that there was of peculiar in his manner into increased relief. Emmy, taking attentive note of every thing, could not but come to the conclusion that her father, though ready to make an effort for the sake of hospitality, was by no means so glad to see Mr. Graham as her mother had been.

The dinner was got through rather quickly in spite of the variety of the courses, nor did the gentlemen needlessly prolong it by sitting over their wine. As soon as the stage of dessert was reached, Austin rose, saying that he must go to look after the builders at Chorcombe Lodge, and begging Mr. Graham to excuse him. This Mr. Graham was probably willing enough to do, he and Olivia having arranged to take an after-dinner walk, on which they were thus set free to start without further delay.

The declining sun was still some way above the horizon when they left the house, shedding a soft golden glow on the surrounding expanse of fields, and lending new transparency to the tender green leaves amid which the birds might be heard twittering their evening song. Every thing was looking very beautiful, and doubly beautiful to the lovers, who now for the first time that day found themselves alone.

"Which way shall we take?" said Olivia, as the garden-gate of the Laurels swung behind them, and they looked round at the prospect of open smiling country which spread itself on either hand.

"You must be my guide, Olivia; you know the place, and I don't. Perhaps across those fields and down to that brook—"

"Oh yes! very pretty, but it does not lead anywhere in particular. I think if we went up the road towards where you see those trees—"

And Olivia pointed to a large mass of trees at some distance, where the sunlight, gilding the rippling foliage of the topmost boughs, threw into bold relief the dark wall of trunks and branches underneath.

"Very well, it is all the same to me, of course."

It was all the same to him in very truth. There was only one thing this evening he cared about, and that was the companionship of Olivia. Otherwise he might still have thought that the fields leading down to the brook looked more tempting than the dusty road.

They went along that same dusty road half a mile or more (only they never noticed whether it was dusty or not), and then, having turned into another road which made an angle with it, they found themselves walking under the shadow of the trees pointed out by Olivia, and now only separated from them by a high stone wall.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"ALL OF THIS IS MINE AND THINE."

The dinner that day was very sumptuous and very grand, very formal and very stiff. Nor was the stiffness altogether owing to the impressive-

"They are fine trees, are they not?" said Olivia, availing herself of a momentary pause in a conversation which to Mr. Graham had been so all-engrossing that he had had no eyes for trees or any thing else except Olivia's face. "They belong to a private park."

"Oh indeed!" said Mr. Graham, with as little interest as it was possible for him to feel in any remark made by his betrothed.

"Yes," said Olivia faintly, for she was afraid that he might inquire whose park it was. But the question never occurred to him.

They went a few yards in silence, and then Olivia, still speaking rather faintly, resumed:

"Suppose we go in and look at the grounds? They are free to any respectable person."

"I think it would be almost better to keep to the open country," said Mr. Graham, who did not like the idea of his delicious *tête-à-tête* with Olivia being interrupted by a parley with a gate-keeper or gardener. "I don't care for places where one is only admitted on sufferance."

"Oh! but indeed you need have no feeling of that sort here. The people at the lodges know me quite well; Emmy and I wander about under the trees all day sometimes. And really I should like you to see the grounds; they are considered very pretty."

"Oh! by all means, then," said Mr. Graham, to whom the matter was, after all, one of nearly complete indifference.

In a few seconds more they came to a place where there was a break in the high stone wall, and where, on the other side of a handsome iron gate, there was visible a pretty little cottage, evidently a gardener's house or porter's lodge, with a well-kept carriage-road winding upward through an avenue of trees.

"This is one of the entrances," said Olivia, and she put her arm through the rails of a little side-gate, which was a kind of supplement to the larger one; then, lifting an inside latch with all the dexterity of a practised hand, she stepped quickly across the threshold. As she held the gate open for Mr. Graham, a man appeared at the door of the little house, who immediately pulled off his cap, and hurried forward to assist. She motioned him back, however, with a wave of her hand.

"Ah! how do you do, Hopkins? No, thank you, don't trouble yourself. This way, if you please" (the last words were spoken to Mr. Graham). "You see I am very well known here, as I told you."

And the lovers passed together under the thickest shadow of the trees, while the man retreated into the house.

"I hope you like these dear old trees, Harry?" asked Olivia, slipping her arm within that of her betrothed. "I do so want you to like whatever I like, you know."

"They are magnificent trees, certainly," he said, rousing himself to take an interest in the scene, and looking round with genuine admiration. And indeed it would have been impossible to look round and not feel admiration at the sight of those stately moss-grown trunks, hoary and gnarled with age below, and yet above decked with a fresh crown of new leaves which, flickering against the pale gold-tinted azure of the evening sky, seemed to bear witness to perpetual youth.

"I may have grown a little wiser with time," said Olivia, raising her eyes watchfully to his face as she spoke, "but I used to fancy that people who owned a place like this, people who had the right of walking under their own trees at any hour of the day or night they pleased, were so privileged and ought to be so happy! What do you think about it?"

"Well, they possess an element of happiness, there is no denying, though not an indispensable one by any means."

"Oh no!" said Olivia, "not indispensable, of course."

"No, for there is only one indispensable element of happiness in the world—only one to me, at least, and that—" With this he looked straight into Olivia's eyes, and said something which made her blush very much, but which, as it was supremely uninteresting to any body but themselves, need not be here reported. For some time they walked on, and Olivia was not able, or perhaps did not particularly try, to turn the conversation to more rational subjects.

But though she did not lose a word of what he was saying, she managed so to shape the direction of their walk that, emerging presently from the trees, they came to a pause, in sight of a long range of gray stone building which, situated on the top of a gentle incline, seemed to dominate the rest of the park, and still glowed in the light of the setting sun.

"That is the house," said Olivia.

"Had we not better turn?" suggested Mr. Graham, who did not wish to leave the shelter of the friendly trees.

"Oh no! I should like you to look for a little while. We are doing no harm, I can assure you; the owner has been away from home for some time, and has not yet returned. Well, what do you think of it?"

"It is a very fine old house indeed."

"There is a little bit that dates back from the reign of Edward the Third—a very little bit, but still better than nothing. The place was almost entirely rebuilt at the end of the seventeenth century, and then there was an addition forty or fifty years ago. But I like to think of that little bit from the reign of Edward the Third; it has been so repaired and restored that I hardly know where to look for it, but wherever it may be it gives a sort of charm— Ah! you think me very foolish, I dare say."

"No I don't. I look on the place with more respect myself in consequence of it."

"You do? And the house is a very nice comfortable one inside—one of the most comfortable in the county, so at least every body says."

"I am sure it must be. It is about the finest old country-house I have ever seen."

"You really think so?" said Olivia, looking up with a slightly flushed face. She paused and looked down again, then asked in somewhat tremulous tones: "Do you think you would like to live in such a house as that?"

"I am afraid it is not much use to think about it."

"Well, but just make an effort of imagination for a minute. Suppose you lived in England, and suppose you were very rich, would you approve of that particular house as a home?"

"I could approve of no home without you, Olivia."

"Ah! but my company must be part of the supposition, of course; you must never leave me out of your calculations now. Well, under these circumstances would you approve of it?"

"Under these circumstances I should think it the very perfection of a home."

Again Olivia's face flushed, and for a moment she was mute with sheer happiness.

"Shall we go a little nearer?" she said presently, and began to move forward as she spoke.

Her arm was resting on that of her lover, and of course he moved forward too. But though he could not resist the gentle force that guided him in the direction of the house, though indeed he allowed himself to be thus guided for some way in silence, it was not the direction he would have chosen. He wanted to be alone with Olivia, and not in full view of the windows of a large country-house.

"Have we not gone far enough?" he asked at last, seeing that she still went on without any sign of coming to a halt. "I think you must be mistaken about the family being from home, you see the windows are all open."

"I suppose the owner's return is expected very soon, and they are getting things ready, but I am sure it has not taken place yet. Pray let us go on a little farther; I should like you to see as much as you can."

They went on accordingly—walking remorselessly across the smooth green turf which was evidently the pride of the gardener's heart, but Olivia said it did not signify—went on till they were only separated from the house by a narrow strip of flower-garden. Then Olivia said:

"I think we must go in and look at some of the rooms. I know the housekeeper quite well; there will not be the slightest difficulty. Really the place is well worth seeing, and there is a view from the drawing-room windows—"

"The view can be no better than what we see here for ourselves, and as for the rooms, I can imagine them. It is very kind of you, dearest, but I think—"

"Oh! but please do come, Harry. I really wish you to see."

Thus saying, she disengaged her arm, and set herself to undo the fastening of a little gate opening into the garden, which she forthwith entered. Mr. Graham of course had no choice but to follow.

She stepped briskly across the garden to a small glass-pannelled door, the handle of which she turned without the ceremony of even a preliminary tap.

"The principal entrance is round at the other side, but we shall find this way the quietest. Come, Harry—no, you need not be afraid; I can assure you there is no danger of any body making the slightest objection."

Again he had no choice but to follow, and she led the way quickly through a succession of corridors till at last they found themselves in a spacious hall at the foot of what seemed to be the principal staircase. As they drew near they saw, crossing the hall towards the staircase, a spruce maid-servant.

"Oh, ma'am!" exclaimed the girl, starting as she caught sight of Olivia, and then she dropped a profound courtesy.

"Good-evening, Jane. You need not trouble yourself to wait—I am only showing the gentle-

man something of the house. There is no one in the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"No one, ma'am."

"Then this is the way, Mr. Graham."

And with these words Olivia went across the hall, and, throwing open a door, ushered her lover into a large and handsomely furnished room, with long windows looking on the flower-garden and park beyond.

"This is the drawing-room, Harry; how do you like it?"

"It is very splendid. Yes, indeed the house is well worth seeing, especially as you have been able to give me a sight of it with so little trouble. And this is the view you told me of?"

He went up to one of the windows. Olivia followed him, and for a while the two stood together looking at the prospect without. It was a beautiful prospect at all times—the downward-sloping sward, the groups of old trunks and wide-spreading branches, and a glimpse of open country showing itself at the end of a long vista formed by a break in the trees just opposite the house—more beautiful than ever as seen now in the quiet evening light, with the crimson flush of sunset still lingering on the horizon.

"I am glad you like the place," said Olivia, speaking for the first time after a long silence.

"Like the place! every body must like such a place as this."

Again Olivia was silent, then, looking on the floor, she remarked in rather a low husky voice:

"You have never asked me yet any thing about the owner."

"Have I not? I suppose because the only thing it concerned me to know about him was whether he was at home or not, and you have told me that already. Who is it, then?"

"I told you a little while ago that he was not at home," said Olivia, evading the question, and beginning to tremble violently, "because it was true then. But it would not be true now."

"Why, Olivia, what can you mean?"

She laid her hand gently on his shoulder, and, looking very intently on the floor, whispered:

"I mean, dear Harry, that you are the owner—you; for all that is yours is mine, and all that is mine is yours. Do you understand?"

She lifted her eyes timidly to his face. He was gazing at her with a look half startled, half perplexed, and she went on to explain, with eyes once more cast down:

"Yes, dear Harry, you chose me thinking I was poor and friendless, and oh! how proud and grateful you have made me by that choice no words of mine can ever tell. But I was not poor, Harry, though friendless enough, Heaven knows. This is Egerton Park, and Egerton Park was all mine, and now it shall be all yours; and this is the new owner's welcome."

And, with an instinctive endeavor to make him forget by greater deference that he was the receiver and she the giver, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips. As she did so, she found that it was cold as marble.

"Harry!" she cried in sudden alarm, "you are not angry with me, surely? I ought to have told you sooner, perhaps, but I took a childish pleasure in the idea of surprising you. Oh! why won't you speak to me? why do you look so strange?"

There was an expression of pain on his face

which she had never seen there before, nor even imagined possible.

"Are you angry with me, Harry?"

"Angry!" and his eyes rested on her with a look of such unutterable tenderness that she was relieved of all her worst fears forthwith. "But if I had known—if I had only known in time—"

"You would never have spoken to me—yes, I am sure of that. And I can never be thankful enough that you did not know in time—never, never."

She looked up with a smile half arch, half loving. But he did not smile back again, only gazed straight into space with the same expression of pain as before.

"Oh! Harry, do you care for me so little, then? I would have taken any thing from you, and never felt ashamed of it; is your love for me so much less?"

Again the look of tenderness came into his eyes, and she knew that his love was not in fault.

"Why should you grudge to be made rich by me, Harry?"

He hesitated for an instant as though bewildered, then answered stammering, while the blood rushed to his forehead:

"I—I have so little to give in return, you know."

"Ah! how proud you are! how proud, and how unkind! And you are going to give me a great deal—infinite treasures. You are going to give me your name—oh! you cruel Harry!" she expostulated, as he drew back with a shrinking movement which showed how little her arguments availed with him.

He did not answer, and she went on:

"And you are going to give me your love—or, rather, you have given it me already—and surely you are not going to take it away again, and break my heart?"

He caught her in his arms, and covered her cheek with kisses.

"Ah, yes! you have my love! you have my love! and will have it while my life lasts."

"Then you are not going to give me up just because I am Miss Egerton of Egerton Park?" she asked as soon as she was released, trying to hide her blushes under an affectation of sportiveness.

"Give you up! I could not," he answered with passionate, almost defiant vehemence. "I could not."

"Why, then," said Olivia, "I love Egerton Park as I have never loved it yet. But mind, Harry, it is for your sake I love it so, not for its own. I would a thousand times sooner live and die with you in a log-hut in India or America, or where you pleased, than be left to live and die by myself here."

"You would!" he cried eagerly.

"To be sure I would. But to live and die with you in Egerton Park is best of all. Dear Egerton Park! I never thought to be so fond of it."

"Ah, yes! you like Egerton Park best, of course. To be sure, it is only natural that you should."

There was something in his voice which conveyed to Olivia's ear a slight suggestion of disappointment.

"Would you prefer that our home should be

in India?" she asked him. "Because if you have any real reason for wishing to live there rather than here—"

"I do not think I have—any real reason," he said slowly as she paused for a reply. "No," he added dreamily, almost as though he were answering his own thoughts, "there can be no reason except mere feeling."

"Ah yes! I see—the feeling of being so proud that you do not like to take the least little thing from me; but that is a reason I will not recognize for an instant. So you will be content with Egerton Park, won't you, Harry? You know you told me just now it looked the very perfection of a home. And I will try so hard to make you happy in it—ah! you can't think how hard I will try."

"My own dearest! And to make you as happy as you will make me shall be the business of my life."

The compact thus made was sealed as all lovers' compacts are, and then for some time they stood, hand locked in hand, and silently watched the crimson streaks fade on the horizon. The hearts of both were filled with gladness—the hearts of both, in spite of a certain shade of trouble by which Mr. Graham's brow was still clouded.

Presently Olivia remembered that there yet existed a disturbing element in her joy, and turned round to ask:

"You will be able to arrange every thing without going back to India, won't you, Harry?"

He shook his head sadly.

"It is impossible, my darling. My partners are depending on me for plans of a work for which they have already accepted a contract, and, now that I have seen my models, I must return without delay—I can not even put off my journey for another mail. My own love, don't look so vexed—the sooner I go, the sooner I shall return."

"And when will you return?" she asked in a voice half choked by disappointment.

He considered for a moment, and answered sorrowfully:

"It can not be for some months—perhaps not this year at all. I shall first have to see this new work put into train, and then wind up the partnership—But what I can do I will do, you know that."

"You will actually have to leave me in three days, Harry? And for such a long time too?"

"The time will pass quickly, little one, or at least it will seem to have passed quickly when it is over. And when it is over, when once I am with you again, I will be with you always, and we will never, never part more. Is not that a future worth looking forward to?"

She smiled through her tears, and acknowledged that it was. And then they began talking of that happy future, and of how they would spend it, until gradually the troubles of the present became all but blotted out of their remembrance. As they sat there in the gathering dusk, each listening to the sound of the other's voice, Olivia scarcely thought of the impending separation, and Mr. Graham nearly forgot that there was such a property as Egerton Park in the world.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## MR. MOSSMAN'S LAWYER.

AUSTIN'S visit to the works at Chorcombe Lodge was a very short one that afternoon. He had a great deal to say to his wife and daughter, neither of whom he had yet had an opportunity of seeing except in the presence of strangers; and as soon as he judged that due time had been allowed for Mr. Graham and Olivia to have started on their walk, he took his way back to the Laurels.

He found the two ladies alone together in the library, whither Emmy had taken her mother to show her Mr. Tovey's designs for the future city of Waterston. Emmy was in great glee, expatiating on the splendor of the family prospects with a fluency which even for her was unwonted, but Mrs. Waters seemed to take it all very soberly; though, when she heard that the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate was definitively made, she did not fail to congratulate her husband on his acquisition.

It was long before this subject was any thing like exhausted, but at last it had been sufficiently discussed for Emmy to bethink herself that the time was ripe for hazarding a few remarks on Mr. Graham. The dryness of her father's answers, however, soon showed her that this was a topic on which he was not nearly so ready to be discursive as on the other.

"Well, papa, and what do you think of Miss Egerton's engagement? Was there ever any thing so romantic? That he should have taken her all the time for a governess—only fancy!"

"Ah, yes! very curious indeed."

"And so suddenly as it was made up too; I was never so surprised in my life as when mamma told me. After such a short acquaintance—why, it seems only yesterday that we saw him first. But you and mamma have known him for a long time, have you not?"

"Yes—some time, that is—oh yes!"

"But how strange it is, papa, isn't it, to think I never should have heard you speak of him before? And I am quite sure I never did."

"Did you not—ah! well—perhaps; people can't be always talking about every body they know. Let me see—plan No. 4"—here he fumbled among the papers on the table. "And so you found Nidbourne a very pretty place?"

This was evidently all that was to be got out of her father for the present; and after a few commonplaces about the beauties of Nidbourne, Emmy, not without a slight feeling of pique, went up stairs to superintend the unpacking of her boxes.

Emmy would have been more piqued still could she have known that the reticence which her father had shown on the subject of Mr. Graham in her presence was laid aside instantly on her departure. No sooner was he alone with his wife than he raised his eyes from his paper and said:

"And when he is married to Miss Egerton, I suppose he will live at Egerton House?"

"I suppose so—yes, it will be their principal home, of course," said Mrs. Waters placidly.

He bit his lip, and once more busied himself with his papers. Then again he looked up and said:

"Is it not a great pity?"

"What is a pity, Austin?"

"That he should be living in the neighborhood, you know. Yes, upon my word, the more I think of it—so very inconvenient—I wonder you did not try to prevent it, Agnes; you must have seen something of what was going on, and if you had just taken a little pains to keep them apart—"

"Would you grudge him his happiness for a mere matter of convenience?" asked Mrs. Waters; and in her voice was a touch of bitterness very unusual with her.

"No, no; how you talk! only for his sake as well as ours it seems such a risk—Egerton House, of all places in the world! Oh! I know what you are going to say; he will be very careful, of course, and so shall we, and after so many years I dare say it is quite ridiculous to be so nervous. Only you must remember that we are not nobodies any more now, but, as I may say, the observed of all observers; and if he were to be in the least imprudent—"

"You need not be afraid," said Mrs. Waters; and the same touch of bitterness was still audible in her voice. "If he were inclined to be imprudent, you would have found it out before now."

"True, very true. Oh yes! it is quite absurd of me, of course—I know very well there is not the slightest danger."

He relapsed into silence with the air of one convinced of his own mistake, and for a while there was nothing said on either side. At last Mrs. Waters spoke again, this time in the gentle tones natural to her.

"You will pay him what you owe before he goes away again, won't you, dear?"

He shifted uneasily on his chair, and his cheeks flushed a little.

"I don't know exactly—I think— Is it any great object with him to have the money immediately?"

"I don't suppose it is; at least he has never said any thing about it. But I should like him to have it, for all that, please, Austin; I could not bear to think that there should be any further delay."

"Yes, but if I pay him interest, it will positively be better for him to leave the money a little longer in my hands."

"Why should you not wish to pay it at once, dear?"

"Why? Oh! well, the fact is—" and the color deepened yet more on his cheeks—"the fact is, it would be more convenient to let it stand over a little. I have been spending a good deal of ready-money lately—the Beacon Bay estate, and so on."

Mrs. Waters turned pale with consternation.

"Oh! Austin, what do you mean? You have been spending so much that you actually can not afford—"

"Afford! do you talk as if I couldn't afford a trumpery four hundred pounds? No, no, it's only that I don't want to spend more ready-money than I can help just at present—that's all I mean."

"How much did the Beacon Bay estate cost you, Austin?" asked the wife anxiously.

"Not a penny more than it is worth, nor half so much either; so make your mind easy about that."

"How much, Austin dear?" she repeated.

"Well, if you must know, forty thousand down, and forty thousand remaining on mortgage. Torrey says it is the greatest bargain that has been going this twenty years. But of course it is a point with me to save all the ready-money I can, in order to get on with the building—the building is the soul of the whole thing, you see."

"Eighty thousand pounds is a great deal to give," said Mrs. Waters nervously. "And what did Mr. Podmore say about it?"

"Podmore! what does it matter what an old fool like Podmore said?"

"He did not approve it, then?"

"No, or pretended not to approve it rather—just because the property wasn't in his hands to dispose of, and none of the agency commission came his way. Sly old fox!—I know what he was thinking of. Don't you let it bother you, Agnes; the railway is sure to be made, let him say what he will; and the man is such a precious ass that I declare I wish I was out of his hands altogether. Look at the mess he made of that affair with Mossman—a pretty lawyer indeed; he knows no more about law or business than a baby."

"The affair with Mossman! Have you had any more trouble about that?"

"Ah! to be sure, I didn't say any thing about it in my letters, for I thought it was no good to plague you, and I wanted to forget it myself if I could. Yes, that fellow Mossman—let me see, he sent in his bill for the watch and chain before you went away, didn't he? ah! of course he did—well, after that he set his lawyer to write to me (Frisby is his lawyer, by-the-way, and a sharp fellow too), and threatened me with an action and I don't know what. So I went to Podmore and asked him what I was to do, and Podmore said that if I refused to pay I should have to get you and Emmy home from Nidbourne as witnesses, and go to all sorts of trouble and expense, and then very likely lose after all, for, as he admits himself, the rascal Frisby is up to every thing, and altogether he seemed to advise me to give in."

"I dare say it was the best way, dear."

"The best way—yes, very likely it was the best way with an old slow-coach like Podmore to manage matters; but it was rather hard to pay for a thing I didn't order just because I had a fool for a lawyer. Not that I minded the money, of course, but I didn't relish knuckling down to a low blackguard like Mossman."

"Better than going to law and losing, at any rate."

"Well, well, that may be, but perhaps I haven't done with going to law yet. There's a talk now of the fellow bringing an action for slander against me just because I told somebody he was a damned infernal swindling scoundrel—and so he is too, and, if you remember, Podmore himself as good as said he was; but Podmore swears he never could have said any thing of the sort. And now that he has got me into the scrape, he can do nothing but shake his head and tell me I was very imprudent; and I shouldn't wonder a bit if the vagabond brings his action, and gets it too, for Frisby understands what he is about, you may make up your mind to that. I often wish I had him to do with instead of Podmore, that's all."

"Oh! Austin dear, you have nothing to re-

gret in that. You know he is not considered nearly so respectable as Mr. Podmore."

"Oh yes! I know all about that, and I dare say it's true too—very likely he is as great a scamp as his client. But if you get a scamp on your own side, mind you, it isn't always such a bad thing. Set a thief to catch a thief, eh? and I think in law they are pretty nearly all thieves together. I have reason to say so in this affair, at all events."

"I am very sorry you should have been worried so, Austin."

"Oh! the worry it has been you have no idea—just at this time, too, when I have so much to think of. Why, what with one thing and another, I have not had a minute to call my own since I saw you."

"I noticed you were looking rather tired, dear," said the wife, glancing at him with some solicitude. "But why should you have been doing so much when there was no need?"

"No need! It is very fine for you who have been enjoying yourself at the sea-side to say there was no need; but how do you suppose you would have found things looking, if there had not been somebody to think for you? Have I not had the carriages to order, and the servants to engage, and the liveries to choose, and—I declare I thought I never should have got through it all. And then the building at Chorcombe Lodge, and the upholsterer's estimate (for I am getting part of the furniture made to order), and the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and the plans of the town, and the proving of the will—enough to keep me at it day and night, I can tell you."

He took out his handkerchief and pressed it to his forehead with an air of weariness before resuming:

"Then to think how my time has been wasted with people calling and writing, and introducing other people—not that it has all been wasted time either, for I have picked up one or two very useful acquaintances that way. Of course one has to be very cautious whom one encourages, but when one sees that something is really to be made out of people—Now the other day I had a Mr. D'Almayne calling on me at the Brown Bear—a great connoisseur in art he is, and upon my word the conversation I had with him quite gave a new turn to my ideas. He says I would only put myself in his hands he would undertake to make my house an attraction to all the lovers of art in the country."

"But you don't care much about that, do you, dear?"

"Oh! I don't want to be too ambitious at present, of course, but, as he says, any gentleman's house, to be a gentleman's house at all, must make some little show of art-treasures more or less; and really, if you could hear him speak, you would understand that it is by no means intrinsically such an expensive taste. But you shall see him and judge for yourself. He is to pass Chorcombe again next week on his way from a great sale of pictures at some nobleman's seat in Wales, and I have asked him to dine with us on Tuesday."

"To dine with us here, Austin?"

"Yes, certainly; so we must see and get a few friends together to meet him; I have asked Podmore and the Elkinsees already. Now then who can this be?"

The visitors' bell had just sounded, and husband and wife both raised their eyes towards the window, wondering if their guest Mr. Graham could have already returned from his walk with Olivia. It was not, however, Mr. Graham whom they saw coming up the gravel-walk, but a spare lithe-looking man of middle age, dressed in slightly rusty black, with bilious complexion, lank wiry hair, and thin wedge-like features of very flexible conformation.

"I declare if that is not Frisby!" exclaimed Austin in astonishment.

"I wonder what he can want," said Mrs. Waters uneasily.

"Something about that affair of Mossman, no doubt. Well, I had better see him, I suppose."

The words had scarcely left his lips when one of the white-headed footmen entered to inform his master that a gentleman was waiting outside who particularly begged the favor of a minute's interview.

"You can show him in," said Austin, loftily.

And immediately the sallow face of Mr. Frisby showed itself in the doorway, composed into its most insinuating expression.

"If you will excuse the liberty, sir," said the visitor, advancing with an air of the profoundest respect, while a pair of shining black eyes were cast in rapid and admiring observation round the room. "I am aware that I ought to have sent in my card," he added, as the door closed, "but the fact was, I was afraid it might create a prejudice, and I was so very anxious to see you—"

"Oh! I had recognized you already from the window," interposed Austin with dignity.

"You had? Then, sir, I can only say how grateful I am to you for admitting me under the circumstances; but of course a gentleman can always distinguish between professional duty and personal feeling. I have called on business, sir, I need not say, or I never should have taken the liberty of presenting myself; but, before I go farther, perhaps Mrs. Waters will allow me to congratulate her on her return. I had the pleasure of witnessing Mrs. and Miss Waters's arrival from my office window this afternoon."

With this he made a very low bow to the lady of the house, who, though secretly rather afraid of him, could not do otherwise than bow in return.

"Pray take a chair, Mr. Frisby," politely said Austin, on whom a very favorable impression had been made by the notion of the lawyer rushing to the window and standing there, to the neglect of all other business, while the carriage containing Mrs. and Miss Waters passed by.

Mr. Frisby, with another very low bow, took a chair as he had been told, and then, clearing his throat, modestly began:

"When I say I have called on business, sir, you will naturally wonder that I have not addressed my communication to Mr. Podmore instead of intruding it upon you. So I ought to have done in strictness, no doubt, but the truth is, there was a personal explanation which I was very desirous of making. I don't often trouble the opposite side with personal explanations, but in a case where I feel so much respect as I do in the present, I can't be satisfied without it. You are aware, sir, that I am acting in the interests of Mr. Mossman?"

Austin winced and said he understood so.

"Mr. Mossman came to me in the way of

business, and placed himself in my hands, and naturally I am bound to do the best I can for him, just as I should have been bound to do the best I could for any body else who had come to me as a client—for you yourself, sir, supposing you had done me such an honor. I hope you quite see it?"

"Oh yes! quite," said Austin, with a slight sigh.

"Mr. Mossman conceived that you owed him a certain sum of money; and of course when he employed me it was my duty to take legal steps for pressing the claim, just as, supposing I had had the happiness of being in Mr. Podmore's place, it might have been my duty to take steps towards resisting it."

"Just so," said Austin, with another sigh. "But Podmore didn't resist, you know."

"And now that Mr. Mossman unfortunately conceives himself injured by certain words you have spoken affecting his reputation, it is of course my duty to support his claim under that head also, only entreating you to believe what a hardship I find it to have to act professionally against a gentleman I so much respect and admire. And I am sorry to say that is the business I have come about this evening, sir."

"What! is the man going to bring his action for slander, then?"

"If we can not succeed in arranging a compromise, there is no doubt about it, I am afraid, sir."

"I'll have none of your confounded compromises," cried Austin, angrily. "I've yielded once—and, let me tell you, it was Podmore's doing, and not mine, that I ever paid a penny—and I won't yield a step farther. Let him bring his action, and be damned to him!"

"That is as you wish, sir, altogether," said Mr. Frisby obsequiously. "But if you are going to resist now—and of course it is not for me to advise you one way or the other—but if you are, what a pity it is you gave way in the other matter!"

"Of course it was a pity, and I knew it at the time, and told Podmore so. But better do the right thing late than never."

"As a general rule, no doubt, sir; but I am afraid in the present case—A judge and jury would be sure to regard the act of payment as an acknowledgment on your part that Mr. Mossman's claim was just: and if it was just, the argument will be that you brought false and unwarrantable charges—"

"But the claim was not just, and I never will let it be said that it was—the most swindling, rascally—"

"Austin! Austin!" put in Mrs. Waters in dismay. But Mr. Frisby laid his hand on his heart.

"The privacy of this room is to me sacred," he declared with devout emphasis. "But to return to what we were saying; whether Mr. Mossman's claim was just or not, the great fact remains that it was paid, and that will be enough to raise a presumption of its justice in a jury's mind—you know how proverbial is the stupidity of juries, Mr. Waters—and in that case the plaintiff would be as sure of a verdict as any thing, and nobody could say what damages they might not clap on. There is no calculating the pig-headedness of a jury, really."

"Then what do you think I had better do?" asked Austin, who by this time had nearly forgotten that Mr. Frisby was on the other side, or, if he remembered the fact, resented it no longer.

"On that point it is not for me to advise, of course. But I have reason to believe that my client would be content with a very small sum offered by way of compromise, and I can not help thinking that to avoid the annoyance of a public trial and the risk of heavy damages, it would be worth your while—"

"How much do you suppose he would take, Mr. Frisby?"

The lawyer paused with an air of profound reflection, and then answered deliberately:

"I think I could undertake to compromise the case on the spot in consideration of your note of hand for fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!" said Austin, a little staggered.

"In the last action for defamation that I had to do with, the jury found a verdict for five hundred."

"Had you not better consult Mr. Podmore about it?" said Mrs. Waters, seeing her husband wavering.

"It is quite possible that Mr. Podmore may advise you differently," said Mr. Frisby, and from his manner it might have been thought that he was seconding Mrs. Waters's suggestion. "But if you are going to resist now, it is a terrible pity you did not resist before."

"Ah yes! that idiotic mistake of Podmore's! But he shan't bungle the business any more, that's one thing. I'll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, sit down and make out something for me to sign, and we'll get rid of this cursed nuisance out of hand."

"Well, sir, I really think it is the wisest course you could pursue under the circumstances, speaking quite impartially, you know," said Mr. Frisby with an air of great candor, drawing his seat nearer the table while Austin laid before him pen and paper.

Mrs. Waters said nothing. For her own part, she had a prejudice in favor of Mr. Podmore as a steady-going family lawyer, and something of a prejudice against Mr. Frisby; but then she knew too little of business not to distrust her own judgment. Besides, she had also a strong prejudice in favor of keeping out of law wherever and whenever it was possible, and did not like to make any further suggestion that might have the effect of delaying a settlement.

In a minute or two more Mr. Frisby had made a memorandum of the terms on which, as Mr. Mossman's legal adviser, he was willing that the affair should be arranged, and handed it to Austin to sign. This, after a careful reading and re-reading of the document, which gave him a high opinion of his own caution, Austin presently did, though not altogether with a good grace.

"That confounded Podmore!" he muttered as he laid down the pen. "Well, Mr. Frisby, here it is; but though it may be law, mind you it isn't justice."

"Ah! sir, law and justice don't always go together, worse luck," said Mr. Frisby, casting his eye over the paper which Austin pushed towards him, and folding it up with visibly heightened spirits. "It isn't because a man has got

a good cause that he wins, or a bad cause that he loses; it is only just a matter of how the affair is managed for him. The glorious uncertainty of the law, sir, eh? But it's very shocking; seriously, it's very shocking."

"If you had managed my affair from the first I believe you would have won for me," said Austin emphatically.

"Oh, sir!" said Mr. Frisby, smirking.

"I believe you would. As you say, it was all that cursed blunder of Mr. Podmore's advising me to give in."

"Oh! sir, excuse me, I didn't quite say that. Though I won't deny that I have seen much weaker cases successfully defended."

"And what possessed Podmore not to defend mine, then?" asked Austin bitterly. "But I suppose he felt his own incompetency—that was it."

"Oh! Mr. Waters, you are really very severe on us poor men of law. No, you must let me stand up for Mr. Podmore, if you please, sir; he is a most respectable man, and for all matters of ordinary routine business thoroughly to be depended on. But he belongs to the old school—of course we all know that—and members of the old school are apt to strike us men of the world as rather slow and timid in their ideas, are they not, sir?"

"Oh yes! slow enough and timid enough in all conscience," said Austin surlily.

"There seems to be a want of go about them, if I may use the expression. Why, there is even Mr. Podmore—a first-rate man for all routine business as I have said—and yet I have actually heard that he goes about throwing cold water on this Beacon Bay scheme—quite one of the finest ideas of the age, you know, sir. And by-the-way, that reminds me you have something to do with it, I think?"

"I have bought the whole property," said Austin, unconsciously drawing himself up as he spoke.

"You have, sir!" said Mr. Frisby with well-affected surprise. "Allow me to offer you my heartiest congratulations. Why, then I suppose I have been misinformed as to Mr. Podmore's views, after all."

"No you have not; he tries to make out that they won't so much as get the railway."

"No, does he really though?—a thing that is as certain as daybreak to-morrow morning. Quite inconceivable, upon my word, how people can so blind themselves."

"Just what I say," rejoined Austin with a triumphant look at his wife. "But none so blind as those that won't see."

"I can't make it out at all," went on Mr. Frisby, pondering as though still lost in perplexity. "If it was any body else than Mr. Podmore, I should think—"

"What should you think?" asked Austin inquisitively, as the speaker suddenly interrupted himself.

"I was going to say that if it had been any body else than Mr. Podmore, I should think that he didn't want you to put your money in a good investment because he had a bad investment of his own to recommend—he! he! But that is impossible with a person of Mr. Podmore's respectability—quite out of the question. Though I won't say but what there are some lawyers



capable of it—ah! too many, I am afraid, Mr. Waters."

"I suppose there are," said Austin thoughtfully, for he was trying to remember if Mr. Podmore's arguments would bear any such construction.

"Ah! we are a bad lot, sir, a very bad lot. Don't believe a word we say, Mr. Waters, and then you're safe."

But this warning had only the effect of inspiring Austin with greater confidence in his new friend than ever.

"Ah! you may laugh, sir, but it is too true—only too true; we are not to be trusted an inch farther than you can see us—he! he! But dear me! it is getting quite dark; I am afraid I have been trespassing sadly on your valuable time."

And Mr. Frisby rose to go, not without an idea that he was leaving a very good impression behind him.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Frisby," said Austin patronizingly. "On the contrary, I am very glad to have had this conversation with you."

"You flatter me very much, sir. And I am sure if you only knew how gratified I am to have had this opportunity of paying my respects to you and Mrs. Waters—"

"Oh! but I quite hope this opportunity may not be the last," said Austin, even more graciously than before. He had a notion that it might possibly be worth while to reserve an opening for the future cultivation of Mr. Frisby's acquaintance.

"I'm sure, sir, how to thank you for your kindness I really don't know. And I hope I need not say that any commands which you may at any time have for me I shall always be proud to obey. Good-evening, sir. Mrs. Waters, I have the honor of wishing you a very good evening."

Austin bowed, and Mrs. Waters bowed; and Mr. Frisby, having made a lower bow than either, was about to pass out of the room when the master of the house rose and came after him.

"I will open the door for you, Mr. Frisby."

For somehow Austin felt reluctant to let his visitor go without making some further step towards securing his good-will. Who knew what bids might be made for that good-will, and from what quarter, before the occurrence of another opportunity such as the present?

"Oh sir!" exclaimed Mr. Frisby, in modest deprecation of so much honor.

But in spite of protest Austin persisted in accompanying him into the hall. Nor did his politeness stop even here.

"Let me see," he said, as soon as they were out of the room, "we are expecting a few friends to dinner next Tuesday. I wonder if you will join us—if you have no engagement, that is?"

"There are some occasions, Mr. Waters, on which all engagements give way," rejoined Mr. Frisby with almost reverential courtesy. "Next Tuesday did you say, sir?"

"Next Tuesday, at seven o'clock."

"I shall be only too happy to avail myself of the privilege," said Mr. Frisby solemnly.

Matters being thus arranged, Mr. Frisby bowed himself out, and started on his walk home in high good-humor, while Austin returned to the library in high good-humor also, and with a feeling of having made one of the shrewdest strokes

of diplomacy he had ever made in his life. And yet, well pleased as he was with his evening's work, he was not in quite such a hurry as might have been expected to announce his triumph to his wife. The fact was, he knew that his wife did not understand much about business; and he had an instinctive suspicion that to any body understanding less about business than he did himself the profound wisdom of his policy might not be so instantly apparent as it ought to be.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### COUSIN RANDAL AGAIN.

THREE days had passed, and Olivia sat alone in a pleasant morning-room opening on the bright flower-garden and sunlit lawn of Egerton Park. Alone—that was nothing new, but it was something new for her to feel quite so much alone as she did just now. For in that room a few minutes ago she had parted from her lover, and the hitherto unknown rapture which she had found in his companionship made solitude seem more solitary than ever it had done before. As she cast her eyes round, looking at the chair on which he had sat, the writing-table on which his arm had rested, the paper-weight he had unconsciously made precious by trifling with, the spot where he had stood to bid her farewell, the doorway through which she had seen him pass, she felt her sight grow dim, and asked herself with a kind of consternation how she should get through the months which must elapse before she could see him pass through that doorway again.

And yet in the midst of her pain she was happy—happy with a happiness of which that pain was the best measure. It was because she loved him that she missed him so; because she loved him, and knew that he loved her, and that by his love she was made free to love him without stint. And she did love him without stint, loved him with her whole heart and soul, loved him so well that sometimes she was almost fain to smile at herself for her own feelings. But if she smiled over her feelings occasionally, she was not ashamed of them; she could not be ashamed of bestowing all that she had of love on him of whom she was so proud, to whom she was so grateful. Yes, grateful—how could she fail to be grateful to the man who, supposing her to be poor and dependent, had singled her out from all the world to be his wife, who had given her that delight which she had believed she never could experience—the delight of knowing herself to be loved for her own sake? As she thought of all that he had done for her, comparing her present self with the poor useless vacant thing she had been before, she looked up brightly through her tears, and acknowledged that, in spite of temporary separation, she was supremely blest.

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Randal Egerton has called. I said I didn't know if you were at home, ma'am."

Olivia brushed her tears hastily away.

"Mr. Randal Egerton! Oh! show him in, by all means."

She had never been less in the mood for receiving visitors, but her happiness made her kindly disposed towards all the world, and certainly she could not think of sending from her door her

own cousin and her father's nephew. So when the visitor was ushered in, she went forward with extended hand to meet him, feeling more amicably inclined towards him than perhaps she had ever felt before, but still with a certain mechanical dreaminess in her manner which, had the young man observed it, he would hardly have deemed complimentary. He did not observe it, however, and, striding forward with eager gallantry, took the proffered hand and raised it to his lips.

"Welcome back to Somerset, fair cousin."

"Thank you, Randal," said Olivia cordially, for it seemed to her for a moment that he was congratulating her on something besides her return home—and she allowed him to retain her hand a little longer than usual. "You are all quite well, I hope?" she asked presently, with a sudden recollection of the proprieties of the occasion.

"Quite well—well enough, considering the dullness you have condemned us to, at least. Why, Olivia, we thought you were never coming home."

"Did you? Still I have not been so very long away. Won't you sit down, Randal?—here is a chair," she added quickly, for she thought he was about to step towards the seat which Mr. Graham had occupied that same morning.

"It did not seem long to you, perhaps, but it did to us," he answered politely, as with much satisfaction he took the chair which Olivia had pointed out, almost close to her own. "And how long have you been back?"

"I returned three days ago. It was very kind of you to think of coming to see me so soon."

"Oh! that's nothing—I would have been over a great deal sooner, but I have been up in town for the last week, and only got home yesterday. I did not even know that you were back till I inquired at the lodge just now, but I could not wait a day at home without coming over on the chance of seeing you."

"It was very kind of you," reiterated Olivia.

He was quite surprised to find her so gracious, and determined to make the most of his opportunity.

"Kind! Oh! well, I can't say any thing about that. There is no merit in doing what you can't help, you know."

And he heaved a deep sigh.

Olivia had been so much engrossed with her own feelings and her own ideas that she did not quite understand what he meant, and looked at him with surprised inquiry. Her glance was met by another so tender that it roused her from her waking trance more effectually than any thing that had gone before, at the same time that it cast an abrupt chill on the friendliness with which she had been disposed to regard her visitor. Was he actually going to begin that wearisome tale of mock love over again? He had heard nothing of her real love, then? To be sure, this was the first time that he had been in the neighbourhood of Egerton Park since her engagement had been made known.

"Ah! Olivia, you pretend not to understand, but it is only pretense. You understand that I love you, you understand—"

"Mr. Egerton!" said Olivia sternly. It seemed a kind of profanation that Randal Egerton should sit there speaking to her of love in that

room where Harry Graham had spoken to her of love so short a while before.

"Olivia!" he cried in distracted accents. But all cousinly kindness was thoroughly chilled in her heart now, and she went on without compunction:

"I see you have not heard of what has happened since we met last, Randal."

"Of what has happened—why, what has happened?" he asked, looking at her in surprise. He noticed now that there was something unusual about her, that there had been something unusual about her all the time they had been talking; but it was beyond his skill to discover what that something was, still more to form any theory as to its cause.

"Randal, you must congratulate me on being very happy," she said, with a sudden influx of the universal philanthropy in which even Randal Egerton was included. "I am engaged."

He stared as though hardly understanding the meaning of the words.

"Engaged! Engaged to be married, do you mean?"

"Yes, engaged to be married."

He was silent—stunned by a blow the most disagreeable that he had ever experienced. Olivia going to be married—the broad acres of the family estate, which he had never been able to regard without something of an owner's interest, about to be transferred to an utter stranger, and, so far as he and his were concerned, blotted out of existence! And if the sense of loss and disappointment was strong, stronger yet was the sense of personal mortification and defeat. He had laid deliberate siege to Olivia's heart, and failed, and had not only failed, but had been beaten in the competition by another beyond doubt infinitely his inferior. He, Randal Egerton, had condescended to avow a preference for a woman who had been a governess, who was not a beauty, and who was some months older than himself—he had even condescended to feel something like a preference for her—and this was his reward! Heavens and earth! As he thought of it all, the very room seemed to spin round with him.

"You are very much surprised, I think," he heard Olivia say at last.

He stirred himself up, and prepared to play his part. It would not do to make her think that he was regretting her property, and, strange to say, he was yet more jealous of letting her suspect what modicum of sincerity there might have been in his past professions of tenderness.

"I am very much surprised, yes," he answered smiling. "You have so often said you were going to be an old maid that upon my word I was beginning to believe you. And then so cool-headed and sensible as you have always shown yourself—"

"And you think that now I am showing myself hot-headed and foolish, you mean? Well, we will not argue about that. But are you not going to congratulate me?"

"I will congratulate you, Olivia," he replied, with the mild gravity of an elder brother appealed to by an impassioned younger sister, "when, as your near relation, I am satisfied that your choice has fallen on one worthy of you, and worthy of recognition by your family. What is he, and what is his name?"

"His name is Henry Graham," said Olivia haughtily; "and he is so exactly what I wish him to be that I would not have any thing about him changed for the world. I am satisfied, and that may be enough for those connected with me."

"Graham—Graham. Of what family?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Not of large property, then?"

"Not of large property that I know of. But it seems to me that these are questions entirely unwarranted on your part."

"Excuse me, my dear cousin, but I can not think so. You are the heir of an old and honored family—I am your near relation—and surely I have a right to satisfy myself if I can that you are not throwing yourself away on some needy adventurer who is thinking of nothing but your money. And certainly, with your strong sense, you must understand that when a woman situated as you are receives professions of love from a man of no property, the presumption is—"

"I know what the presumption is," interrupted Olivia, drawing herself up with a glowing pride in herself and her betrothed such as she had never yet felt, for she was thinking how different the reality was from what her cousin imagined, and imagined not unnaturally. "But perhaps your kind concern may be allayed when you hear that I was engaged to Mr. Graham before he knew that there was such a place as Egerton Park in existence. He asked me to marry him supposing me to be neither more nor less than Miss Waters's governess."

But somehow the announcement which she felt such glory in making did not appear to impress Randal as she had expected. He looked surprised indeed; but his surprise was expressed in a shrug of the shoulders, as though it were excited rather by something in herself than by what she had said.

"My dear Olivia! And do you mean to say you actually believe that?"

Olivia's lip curled with measureless scorn.

"You can not believe it, I dare say," she answered. She remained sitting for a moment, her lip curling still as she thought of the pitiful shallowness of nature that could not even comprehend the magnanimity which in Henry Graham seemed a mere matter of course; then she rose with the stateliness of an empress.

"Mr. Egerton, I will wish you good-morning. Another time, when you are able to speak without insulting me, I shall be happy to see you."

And ere he could reply, she swept from the room with an air of offended dignity which he had never even imagined in her.

The surprise of her abrupt departure, coming so soon after that other surprise of finding her and her fortune about to pass out of his reach for overmore, was fairly overpowering, and for some time he sat where she had left him, pondering over his disappointment and his wrongs. For though his self-love had enabled him to bear the wound with comparative equanimity while Olivia was present, the wound had been a very deep one for all that, and the more he probed it the deeper he found it.

But it was no good to sit brooding there all morning, so at last he rose, and, with a bitter look round at the smiling stretches of turf and shady woods in which he could no longer feel a proprietary interest, he strode out of the room and

the house, and went round to the stables. There, addressing with a smiling face the first servant he met, he gave directions for his horse to be got ready and brought down to the entrance of the park, whither he would make his own way on foot—because he preferred to walk, he said; in reality because he could not endure to hang about in view of gossiping grooms and stable-boys.

He set out on his walk in a sufficiently unenviable frame of mind, passing by with downcast eyes the prettiest bits of landscape, and occasionally muttering the name of Graham between his teeth. Probably by reason of this preoccupation, he suddenly found himself, before he was aware of it, within a few feet of a female figure sitting under shelter of a large parasol on a rustic bench beside the path. He was not in the mood for caring to appear polite, and was about to turn another way, when a movement of the parasol showed him a fair, fat, flaxen-ringed face which he at once recognized as that of Olivia's elderly lady-companion, Mrs. Waddilove. He had not hitherto been disposed to be specially civil to Mrs. Waddilove, whom indeed he had been apt to regard as a decided bore; but to-day he had no sooner caught sight of her than he advanced, bowing and smiling as though she had been the most valued of his friends.

"Ah! Mrs. Waddilove, how do you do? Enjoying the beauties of nature, I see?"

And he actually went up and gave her his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" said Mrs. Waddilove respectfully, thinking to herself the while what a very nice young man he was. "Yes; it is very pleasant here, is it not? I have been away visiting my friends while Miss Egerton was in Dorsetshire, and upon my word I find it quite delightful to be back again."

"Ah yes! I dare say. And so"—here he took care to smile more than ever—"so it seems there have been important changes in progress during your absence. My cousin going to be married—who could possibly have thought it?"

He had done his best to persuade her to be married for some years past, but now it pleased him to speak as though in the mere notion of her marriage there were some strange incongruity.

"Well, it was very unexpected, was it not, sir?"

"Unexpected!—the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of, upon my honor. And then the air of romance there seems to be about it, on her part at least, poor thing—that's the queerest bit of it all. Why, if she had been a girl of seventeen instead of what she is, she couldn't have been more in love, positively."

He was aware, or might have been aware if he had thought about it, that his own former designs on his cousin must have been perfectly well known to Mrs. Waddilove, and yet he could not deny himself the pleasure of this dig.

"It is very strange, sir, certainly," said Mrs. Waddilove, who, as a companion about to be superseded, was no better pleased with Olivia's engagement than Randal himself. "But she seems to be very happy, and that is the principal thing, of course."

"Oh! of course, and if I could only be certain that it would last, I could wish nothing better, I need not say. But so much depends

on how this Mr. Graham may turn out— Can you tell me any thing about him?"

"He seems a very nice gentleman, sir, but nothing so wonderfully out of the way either. He is very clever and all that, I dare say, but I don't know that I should call him particularly good-looking myself."

And as Mrs. Waddilove spoke, she could not help marvelling at Miss Egerton's taste in preferring a bronzed weather-beaten man of middle age like Mr. Graham to the handsome cavalier who even then stood before her, and whom the good lady knew that in her own younger days she could not possibly have resisted.

"Ah! I understand—as ugly as sin," muttered Randal with a caress of his silken beard. "But what I rather meant was—who is he, what is he, where does he come from, how did she get to know him? These are not questions I can exactly put to my cousin, of course, and yet as her relative you will see that I must be anxious—"

"It is very kind of you, I am sure, sir, and I wish there was more that I could tell you, but I only came back yesterday, you must remember. He seems to have been a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Waters, by what I can make out, and went down to visit Mrs. Waters and her daughter at Nidbourne. I don't suppose Miss Egerton ever saw him till then; indeed, now that I think of it, I am sure she never did, for she told me herself that this is his first visit home from India for nearly twenty years."

"India! Not a military man, is he?"

"Oh no! sir."

"In some rascally business, then. And do you mean to say she knows nothing of him except through the Waterses?"

"I think that was the only introduction."

"And they have not had him under their eyes for twenty years, it seems. Why then, for aught she knows, he may be a regular swindler and blackleg, with a wife and a dozen children, perhaps. This ought to be looked into, Mrs. Waddilove."

"Certainly it ought, sir," said Mrs. Waddilove, almost frozen with virtuous horror at Randal's last suggestion. "And I'm sure how thankful she ought to be to think what a kind friend and adviser—"

"Oh! well, I do what I can, but it is very difficult to befriend and advise some people," said Randal, his brow darkening as he thought of how Olivia had taken his display of interest in her affairs. "And where is this Mr. Graham to be found, supposing that for my cousin's sake I thought it right to take any steps?"

"He has been staying at the Laurels—Mr. Waters's new place, you know. But I am pretty sure he must have started by this time: it is more than an hour since he was here to say good-bye to Miss Egerton, and he would naturally be with her up to the last minute he could, with such a long separation to look forward to."

"Separation! Where is he going, then?"

"Back to India, sir, did you not know? He is obliged to return to wind up his affairs, and will be several months gone."

"Several months!" Randal's brow became perceptibly clearer. Who knew what several months might bring forth? He could not now

regard the game as quite up, and was tempted to regret that he had taken such trouble to conceal from Olivia the pang which her news had cost him.

"I am very much obliged for your information, Mrs. Waddilove. And now if you will excuse me—my horse is waiting down at the gate. Good-bye; I am very glad indeed to have had the pleasure of seeing you."

And then, with a friendly pressure of the hand, given in the same spirit with which he might have tipped her a sovereign had she been a little lower than she was in the social scale, he turned away, and walked gloomily towards the gate, where, as gloomily, he mounted his horse and rode off. The game was not quite up, perhaps, but he had enough to be gloomy about, in all conscience. It was hardly likely that, with a rival to contend against, he should do in months what he had failed to do in years when there was no rival in the case. Unless indeed he could succeed in discovering something to that rival's discredit—and the man who had made love to an heiress under pretense that he knew nothing about her money was sure to be a discreditable character in one way or another. But then supposing him to be the greatest villain unchanged (as he very likely was), how was the fact to be proved?

In this desponding mood Randal rode on, until at last a new turn was given to his thoughts by a glimpse which he caught of the words "The Laurels" inscribed in neat white letters on a large freshly-painted gate.

"The Laurels—that's where he is, confound him, or has been, at least."

He cast a resentful look at the spruce white house visible through the clustering lilac and laburnum trees that overhung the wall. As he looked, a new idea seemed to occur to him, for he all at once became very meditative.

"I wonder if I could do any good by calling in there some day and asking a few questions," he was thinking.

He considered a little, and found the notion feasible enough.

"I am sufficiently introduced to call, if I like, without making them think there is any thing under it. I have seen the girl at Olivia's often enough, and the mother too once or twice. And, by-the-way, she wasn't a bad-looking girl either if she had been properly dressed. She is the only one, I think."

He looked over his shoulder at the house, no longer resentfully, yet with evident interest.

"She'll have enough to dress on now, at any rate. Two hundred thousand pounds, I think it was—why, Olivia herself doesn't much more than beat that. Ah! but then it isn't the girl's—it is the father's. And if the father is going to lock it up in the Beacon Bay estate, as they said he was when I was here last, and the railway perhaps never to be made at all—"

He shook his head slowly, and relapsed into thought too vague to shape itself into words, even though unspoken ones. Presently he roused himself, and yet again looked back at the house.

"Well, well, I can call in a day or two, at all events. It can do no harm to take a look, and who knows but that at the same time I may find out something? They will be more likely to know than Mrs. Waddilove, anyhow."

## CHAPTER XX.

EMMY WAS RIGHT.

EMMY was not altogether sorry when Mr. Graham went away. Not that she had any personal objection to his society, but it served to keep up in her mind a disagreeable suspicion which she had never yet had the courage to put an end to by a straightforward question, partly because she was afraid of offending her father and mother by an unworthy doubt, partly perhaps because she half unconsciously feared to find that doubt confirmed. It was rather a relief to her, therefore, when the departure of the guest allowed her to drop him and the misgivings connected with him out of her thoughts, as she speedily did amid the distractions of new dresses, new friends, new amusements, and new surroundings. In two or three days she had ceased to trouble her head about Mr. Graham one way or another, except that she sometimes wondered how she had come to be so suspicious of him.

She was sitting with her mother one afternoon in the pretty drawing-room at the Laurels, with her work on her lap—no unsightly undergarment to be hemmed or stitched or darned, be it remembered, but some tangle of silk and beads entirely free from any taint of utility—when a loud peal was heard at the visitors' bell. The drawing-room was at the back of the house, where no view of a new-comer was to be commanded; but visitors were so much a matter of course now that Emmy did not allow herself to be flurried by the uncertainty, and calmly awaited the event with no symptom of interest beyond a smoothing out of the folds of her silk dress.

A servant entered and presented her mother with a card, which Mrs. Waters had only just had time to glance at when the visitor himself appeared in the doorway—a tall, handsome young man with dark hair and eyes, whom Emmy, looking up with some curiosity, recognized at once as Mr. Randal Egerton. And no sooner had she recognized him than she straightway lost some of her composure. The visitors to whom she had lately become accustomed had all been of commonplace humdrum type—Podmores and Elkinsees and Toveys and the like—people whom it was gratifying to be acquainted with on equal terms, but whom even in her poorest days Emmy had never exactly regarded as being fashioned of clay different from her own. But Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, a leading member of the county aristocracy, the only member of the county aristocracy she had ever come across except Olivia (and Olivia was so forgetful of her greatness that others were apt to forget it too), him she had always looked up to as belonging to a world in which she had no part—a world of rank and fashion, of Lady Ediths and Lady Beatrices, of gilded saloons and gay assemblies, of West-End clubs and Bond Street shops, of grand stands and betting-books, of opera coulisses and *rouge-et-noir* at Baden-Baden, of every thing, in fine, that was bright, delightful, wicked, and unattainable. No wonder then that, when she saw so distinguished a personage enter her mother's drawing-room, Emmy should feel mingled with her awe a touch of excitement and elation.

"Mrs. Waters!" he said—advancing, as Emmy remarked to herself, with exquisite grace

—"how do you do? I have had the pleasure of seeing you a few times at my cousin Olivia's, but I am afraid you have almost forgotten me."

"Oh dear no! I remember you quite well," said Mrs. Waters cordially, scarcely appreciating, however, the full force of this delicate flattery. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Egerton."

"You are exceedingly kind. The fact is, I found myself riding in this direction, and, hearing that you lived here, could not deny myself the pleasure of looking in to pay my respects to you and Miss Waters. Miss Waters, will you allow me?"

He picked up a skein of silk which Emmy in her confusion had let fall, and presented it to her with an easy yet respectful elegance of manner such as she had never before been approached with. She blushed and stammered out what she feared was a very awkward acknowledgment of the courtesy; and then all three seated themselves, Emmy smoothing out anew the folds of her dress—there was something in the sound of the rustling silk which she found surprisingly reassuring. When she had got a little settled, she could not help thinking for a moment of John Thwaites, and wondering what he would say if he knew what a guest she and her mother were receiving.

"You and Miss Waters have just been making a stay in Dorsetshire, I believe?" she heard Mr. Egerton say.

"Yes," replied her mother—"at a little place called Nidbourne."

"Ah yes! I think I have heard the name—in a very pretty part of the county, I imagine."

Here Emmy, taking for granted that the stranger's attention was by this time completely diverted from herself, ventured to peep up in his direction, when, to her consternation, their eyes met. She was considerably put out by this little incident, but he did not lose an atom of his graceful self-possession—(how different from John Thwaites!).

"You liked the place, Miss Waters, I need not ask; you looked quite approvingly at the mere mention of its name."

"I liked it very much, thank you," murmured Emmy. "It is a very quiet pleasant little spot."

"I should have thought almost too quiet for a young lady. Do you like country better than town, then?"

"I hardly know," said Emmy, overwhelmed with shame at having to make the confession. "I—I have never been in London."

"Never been in London!" he exclaimed; but his surprise was so entirely free from all flavor of superciliousness that Emmy felt it to be complimentary rather than otherwise.

"We should have gone this summer, I think," she said, striving to lessen the reproach of her inexperience as far as she could, "only papa has so much to do just at present that it is impossible for him to leave home."

"Mr. Waters is quite well, I hope?" Randal asked, with a polite look towards the lady of the house.

"Quite well, thank you," said Mrs. Waters. "He is over at Beacon Bay on business to-day, or I am sure he would have been most happy to see you."

"You are very good to say so. Beacon Bay—I fancy Mr. Waters will have business at Bea-

con Bay for a long time to come, if what I hear is true, at least."

He accompanied the words with so manifest an expression of inquiry that Mrs. Waters felt herself compelled to answer:

"It is quite true. My husband has bought the estate."

"The whole of it? A very fine property, to be sure."

"Yes, the whole of it," said Mrs. Waters, with an almost imperceptible sigh.

"Indeed!" said Randal. "I have to offer him my best congratulations."

There was a pause, during which Emmy, with some dismay at her own audacity, caught herself stealing another look in the direction of the visitor. But this time their eyes did not meet, the young man's being turned towards the floor in apparent contemplation. The truth was, he was considering how he might best turn the conversation to another topic on which he also wished for information.

"I had the pleasure the other day of hearing news that interested me very much," he said at last. "My cousin Olivia's engagement—you have known it from the beginning, I believe."

By this time he had had full leisure to decide upon his own attitude towards the fact which at first hearing had startled him so disagreeably, and, as will be seen, had considerably modified his original manner of treating it.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waters, "it was settled while she was with us at Nidbourne. I hope she will be very happy—indeed I may say that I am sure of it."

"Most sincerely do I trust so," said Randal fervently. "I have only one regret connected with the subject, and that is, that I had not the pleasure of making Mr. Graham's acquaintance before he left for India. I confess I should like to have seen something of the man on whom my cousin's future happiness depends."

"So far as it depends on him I think I can undertake to answer for it," said Mrs. Waters warmly.

"I am so glad to hear you say so," was the delighted reply. "Ah yes! to be sure, I remember hearing that he was a friend of yours. And might I ask if you have known him long?"

Emmy listened very attentively.

"Yes, a great many years—both Mr. Waters and I."

"You can hardly imagine the satisfaction you are affording me, Mrs. Waters. I wonder if I might further ask whether you know any thing of his family and connections? You will not find fault with me for my questions, I know; you must remember that I and my family are the only relations my poor cousin has in the world, and I feel it incumbent on me to make these inquiries on her behalf just as, under like circumstances, you might make similar inquiries on behalf of any one closely connected with you."

With these words he directed a glance towards Emmy, who blushed, and gave one or two little adjusting taps to her dress which made it rustle more than ever. But presently she heard her mother's voice sound in reply, and the rustle was hushed instantaneously.

"I have known his family all my life long. It was considered one of the most respectable in

—," and here Mrs. Waters mentioned the name of the town which had been her own native place.

Emmy's blushes had all disappeared now, forcibly driven away by the excitement of this new discovery. So it was definitely established that Mr. Graham had actually come from the place where her mother had come from—where her uncle Harold also had come from, that was to say. Not that the fact proved any thing in itself, of course, but then why had it never hitherto been mentioned in her presence? She looked up suspiciously. Mrs. Waters was externally calm enough to deceive the eyes of any one not intimately acquainted with her, but the unwonted flush on her cheeks sufficed to convince Emmy that she was laboring under some unusual excitement.

"I can hardly express the relief that this has been to my feelings," said Randal sweetly, but with a certain blankness of look which might have stood as well for disappointment as satisfaction. "So that for Mr. Graham's earlier antecedents you yourself can vouch by personal knowledge, and since then—"

"Since then all who know him in India will tell you that he has been respected and looked up to by every body who has had to do with him," said Mrs. Waters, with something in her manner that seemed almost like pride. "He belongs to the firm of Barret, Phillips and Graham in Bombay, and if you like to inquire—"

"Your assurance is more than sufficient," interrupted Randal chivalrously. "You have not, then, lost sight of him during any part of the time—I mean that a correspondence of some sort has always been kept up?"

"Yes, always."

Another fact for Emmy! Again the fact was one not counting for much in itself; but when it was considered how secretly the correspondence must have been carried on, how Emmy herself had never so much as seen the outside of a letter either directed to India or coming thence—as she thought of it all, suspicion crystallized within her mind into something like certainty, and she became so strongly excited on the subject as to be impatient of every thing that delayed the full explanation on which she was now bent—impatient even of the presence of the brilliant stranger. She was quite relieved, therefore, when, with the courtly grace which seemed so natural to him, he rose to take leave.

"Mrs. Waters, I never can thank you enough for the satisfaction you have given me," he said, in the same sweet voice as before. "I will not intrude longer to-day, but perhaps at some future time you will allow me the honor of repeating a visit which has afforded me so much pleasure."

Of course Mrs. Waters said she would be very happy to see him, and then he shook hands very cordially, first with her and next with Emmy, to whom he bowed with an air of respectful homage which, under ordinary circumstances, would have sent her into a flutter for another half-hour to come. But as it was, she was too impatient to be alone with her mother to think of any thing else.

She was alone with her mother at last, but as she began to think how she should set about what she had to say, she got so nervous that for a minute or two she was unable to say any thing

at all. It was Mrs. Waters, therefore, who spoke first, wondering perhaps at her daughter's unaccustomed silence, and not unwilling to find out its cause.

"Well, Emmy, are you thinking what a polite visitor we have had?"

"He was very polite certainly," agreed Emmy, but she scarcely bestowed a thought on him as she spoke. "How anxious he was to find out something about Mr. Graham!" she added a little tremulously.

Her mother's color had subsided, but Emmy noticed that it rose again at this.

"He wanted his cousin for himself, and he is jealous that she is going to marry somebody else," was Mrs. Waters's somewhat harshly given explanation.

"Oh! mamma, it did not seem to me that he was jealous a bit—indeed I think it must have been all a mistake about his ever caring for her in that way. But he is naturally anxious to know something about the person she is going to marry, and really for my part I think he is quite right. To tell you the truth, I have sometimes wondered myself who Mr. Graham can be."

Emmy's heart beat fast as she uttered the last words, and she bent very close over her work while she waited for her mother's answer.

She waited, but no answer came. Emmy understood that now or never was the time for a decisive question, and, bending over her work closer still, she subjoined, in a voice scarcely audible through her trepidation:

"Do you know, mamma, I have sometimes thought he might have something to do with Uncle Harold?"

And then, the die being cast, she ventured to give a glance upward just to see the effect.

Her mother, evidently in the extreme of agitation, was sitting with drooping head, and face covered by both hands.

"Mamma!" cried Emmy, startled in spite of all her previous suspicions. "It is true, then?"

Mrs. Waters raised her face slowly and turned it towards her daughter. It was pale as ashes.

"Emmy, promise me you will never tell any living soul—promise, as you love your mother."

But Emmy was so overwhelmed by her own conflicting emotions that she hardly noticed the appeal. She was at once surprised, mortified, ashamed, and angry—surprised at the discovery she had made, notwithstanding that she had been half prepared for it—mortified at the ignorance in which she had been kept so long—ashamed of the disgrace of contact with the felon-uncle whose name she had always held in horror—above all, angry that she should have been exposed to such disgrace. And the idea, too, of expecting her to keep the man's secret for him!

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed reproachfully, half crying as she thought of her grievances, "how could you do such a thing—how could you? To let him come here, after all he has done—such a dreadful person—talking to us and living with us just like one of ourselves—and poor Miss Egerton! actually to think you would let her engage herself to him, and never say a word to put her on her guard. Oh! how could you?"

"Emmy, do you want to break my heart? Promise me you will never tell."

"I don't know whether it is right to promise," whimpered Emmy. "Poor dear Miss Egerton—

it seems right-down wicked to let her marry such a person without warning her. Oh, mamma, how could you? I really did think you cared for her."

"I do care for her, Emmy, and it is because I care for her that I am glad and rejoiced to see her marry my brother, for I know he loves her, and will make her happy. He did not want her for her money—you know yourself that he did not; he asked her to be his wife believing that she had not a penny in the world, and he is a rich man now, you must remember. If she had been poor as he thought, you would have seen that it was cruel to part them, and is he to suffer just because she happens to have a few wretched acres of land that he had never heard of? And I can tell you, Emmy, that if he had heard of them he would sooner have cut off his right hand than ask her—he is my brother, and I know what he is made of."

The concluding words were spoken with an air of passionate pride which Emmy thought rather inappropriate to the subject. Still, exaggerated as the tone of her mother's championship seemed, she could not help understanding that in spite of his past faults her uncle did most truly and sincerely love Miss Egerton, and would in all human probability make her happier than any one else could do. So, reflecting thus, Emmy began to relent a little.

"What does papa say?" she inquired. It was natural that her mother should be unduly lenient under the circumstances; but she felt that, if her father had brought himself to forgive the man who in requital of his benefactions had drawn shame and well-nigh ruin on his head, the fact would weigh for a good deal with her. "He knows who Mr. Graham is, I suppose?"

"He knows—oh yes!" answered her mother in low even tones.

"And he has forgiven him, then?"

Mrs. Waters's lip quivered as though under the influence of some strong emotion, but with an evident effort at calmness she brought herself to say steadily:

"He has even accepted favors from him, Emmy. If it had not been for the little sums your uncle Harold has lent us from time to time, I hardly know what we should have done to live; they make up nearly four hundred pounds now."

Emmy looked very much shocked.

"Oh! mamma, you actually mean to say papa has laid himself under obligations—"

"Poverty does strange things sometimes," said Mrs. Waters with a faint smile. "And people are very poor who have to live like gentlemen and ladies on a hundred a year."

"Oh yes! I know, but still— It seems such a degradation to have taken favors from a person like that—a person who has done such a base, wicked thing, and brought such horrible shame on every body connected with him. I wonder how papa could have forgiven him so far, that I do."

"Oh, Emmy!" broke out Mrs. Waters almost with a cry, "how hard you are! how hard! God forgive you, my poor child! you don't know what you are doing."

"I did not mean to be hard, mamma," said Emmy, again relenting a little at sight of her mother's distress. "But one must be just, you see, and poor Miss Egerton—"

"Be just to your uncle, then, who has sacrificed himself to you ever since you were born," said Mrs. Waters impetuously, then more tranquilly she added: "For I am sure he has sometimes sent us money, Emmy, when he wanted it almost as much himself. It is only lately that he has been rich, you know, since he was taken into partnership; but through all the years that he was only a poor struggling clerk he never forgot that we were struggling too. Oh! Emmy, he has been very, very generous; can you not be a little like him?"

Emmy was touched—touched not only by her mother's entreaty and recital of her uncle's benefits, but also by her recollection of the traits of goodness which she herself had seen in him. In particular, she thought of the day when she had beheld him risk his life for that of a poor fisherman, and could not but admit to herself that he might deserve something better than the utter reprobation which she had been disposed to award him.

"Of course I suppose it is possible for a man to do a very wicked thing once in his life without being altogether wicked in himself," she said meditatively.

"Thank God, yes," said Mrs. Waters, more earnestly than her daughter had ever heard her speak before. "Oh! my darling, how can you doubt it? And remember it is not only by the measure of our sin that we are judged, but by the measure of our temptation."

"Yes, and of our repentance," added Emmy, who thought that hardly any amount of temptation could palliate the heinousness of so gross and sordid and vulgar a sin as that of which her uncle Harold had been guilty. "And I suppose he really repents what he has done, does he not, mamma?"

A slightly bitter expression rose to Mrs. Waters's face, as though she deemed her daughter's inquisition over-exacting; but if this was her feeling she overcame it, and answered quietly:

"All men with any good in them repent the wrong that they have done, Emmy."

Emmy saw that she was paining her mother greatly by prolonged discussion, and, understanding that it behoved her to make an effort of magnanimity sooner or later, resolved to make it at once.

"Well, mamma, I don't mind saying that since you and papa have been kind enough to forgive him, I will try to forgive him too."

It seemed to Emmy that her mother did not quite sufficiently appreciate her generosity in making this declaration. 'Certainly it was met by a look much colder than she had anticipated.

"I do what I can, I'm sure," said Emmy apologetically, "but of course it is rather difficult to overlook such conduct all at once. I will promise never to tell any body who he is, and surely that ought to be enough for the present."

"You promise, Emmy—truly and faithfully promise?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Kiss me, my darling. You love me, I think?"

Emmy flung her arms round her mother's neck with a burst of tenderness.

"My own pet mamma! Oh yes! so dearly!"

"Then, Emmy, you will never, never break the promise you have given me to-day."

"Dear mamma, I never will," said Emmy sol-

emnly, for the pathos of her mother's manner had gone to her very heart.

And at the time she thus passed her word she did most religiously intend to keep it.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### TIMON AND HIS FRIENDS.

THE following day was a very important one for the household at the Laurels, bringing with it no less an event than Mr. and Mrs. Waters's first dinner-party—the very first, it need hardly be said, given by them during the whole of their married life. Such being the case, it is not surprising that the occasion was viewed with a good deal of anxiety, and that as the family trio, a long time before the appointed hour, assembled, in the drawing-room to await the coming of the guests, there was even in Emmy's mind a feeling of trepidation which not the most unfeigned admiration of her own toilet could altogether allay.

There was a long period of suspense, rendered at last more intense still by a ring at the bell; and then, after a pause, during which all eyes were turned nervously towards the door, came the first announcement.

"Mr. D'Almayne."

This was the connoisseur in art whose acquaintance Austin had made during his sojourn at the Brown Bear, and in whose honor indeed the party had been originally projected. He was not an artist himself, but took some pains to cultivate the appearance of one; that is to say, he wore his dark hair very long, his beard full and somewhat raggedly cut, and particularly exercised himself in a certain restless distraught look about the eyes which he had seen practised by professional friends with wonderful effect.

Having been introduced to the ladies with as much propriety as Austin's inexperience allowed, this personage inquired, as soon as the first courtesies were exchanged, if they had ever seen the great art collection of Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn in Wales. On being answered in the negative, he proceeded to expatiate on the delights of his recent visit there in the most glowing terms.

"One of the greatest treats I ever had in my life, I do assure you. There are gems yonder which it is perfectly delicious to look at, or rather there were, for it is all broken up now. A great pity, really, considering what a centre of attraction it constituted in the district—why, people came to see it from a hundred miles round and more. But well, it isn't for me to complain, for I have picked up some most delicious things for the merest trifle—things that would be the making of any gallery in the country, and for the price of an old song almost."

He had been addressing the ladies hitherto, but with the last words he gave a glance towards Austin.

"I am glad to hear that your journey has been so profitable," said Austin, feeling himself bound to make some remark.

"As for profitable, I don't know about that, for some of the things are so absolutely delicious that I don't think I can ever bring myself to part with them—unless perhaps to some friend for the sake of friendship, and even then there are one or two gems—. Why, there's a Parmegiano that



beats the one in the Pitti Palace all to nothing, and a Garofalo—

"Mr. Tovey."

With a murmured apology to his new friend, Austin went forward to meet the little man, who came tripping into the room with his usual elastic step. After having duly paid his respects to his entertainers, he was presented to his distinguished fellow-guest.

"Allow me," said Austin flurriedly—"Mr. Tovey, Mr. D'Almayne. I believe I have spoken to you about my friend Mr. Tovey, and to you about Mr. D'Almayne, I think, so that you both know each other already, one may say."

The two gentlemen bowed, but, it must be said, rather stiffly and frigidly. Each had indeed heard of the other from Austin, and a strong mutual prejudice had been the result—Mr. Tovey setting down Mr. D'Almayne as a talking humbug whose art went no farther than the art of picking people's pockets, and Mr. D'Almayne condemning Mr. Tovey as a miserable quack who made a living by ruining people with brick and mortar.

"Mr. and Mrs. Elkins and Miss Elkins."

Poor Mrs. Waters felt the troubles of hostessship thickening fast upon her. The room was beginning to show a sprinkling of guests that looked quite formidable in her unaccustomed eyes, besides which there was something personal to the new-comers themselves which seemed at once to impart an extra flavor of formality to the occasion. They were all three so very staid and erect and unsmiling and wooden—all three, for Miss Elkins was little else than a copy of her mother, only rather faded and washed out; that is to say, slightly paler, slightly slimmer, and with light sand-colored ringlets instead of iron-gray ones. Mrs. Waters hardly knew what to say to them for nervousness, and even Emmy experienced something of the same feeling. Before either had time to recover, a new announcement was heard.

"Mr. Podmore."

But Mr. Podmore came ambling into the room in such evident good-humor that it was impossible to be afraid of him. For though nobody could be more awe-inspiring than Mr. Podmore at certain times and seasons, he was capable of expanding into a high state of social geniality—a mood which nothing was so calculated to produce in him as the prospect of a good dinner. He was pretty sure of a good dinner to-day, and had come so thoroughly prepared to enjoy it that he was hail-fellow-well-met instantly with every body in the room—every body, except Mr. Tovey, whom he knew to have been Austin's adviser in the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and Mr. D'Almayne, who was a stranger to him; and even these he was disposed to patronize.

Still there is a point at which the worm will turn, and the purest milk of human kindness become sour. As Mr. Podmore was standing by his hostess's chair, bending forward to address her with a smiling courtesy reserved for the most favored of his acquaintances, the door behind him opened, and a voice said:

"Mr. Frisby."

Mr. Podmore was visibly startled—so much startled that, instead of going on to finish what he was saying, he stammered and broke down, and was fain to cover his break-down by a fit of coughing, in the midst of which he took an op-

portunity of looking round. From the sudden change which then appeared in him, it was evident that not till the moment of looking round had he believed in the monstrous enormity the possibility of which his ears had suggested. A dark cloud overspread his brow, which forthwith knitted itself into its most severe and magisterial corrugations; his lips, so lately relaxed in a smile, became pursed up into an expression of inflexible sternness which rendered it difficult to believe that they could smile at all; his whole figure straightened and stiffened itself with dignity and righteous anger. There is even reason to believe that he meditated instant departure from the house, but an instinct of lawyer-like prudence restrained him from committing himself to so extreme a measure, and he staid. Nevertheless, though he staid, he did not in the slightest degree unbend from the rigidity of his bearing—gazing steadily into space as Mr. Frisby approached to pay his respects to Mrs. Waters, and only intensifying the fixity of his gaze for the amiable smirk directed in passing towards himself. So freezing was his mien, that Austin, who had hitherto considered it his duty to introduce his guests to each other and set them talking, absolutely dared not make an attempt in that direction in the present instance. For a few moments a grim silence pervaded the room—the silence of a thunder-charged atmosphere—when, to the infinite relief of the master and mistress of the house, if of no one else, another arrival took place which had the effect of reviving the suspended buzz of conversation.

"Miss Egerton and Mrs. Waddilove."

At sight of her friend's well-known face, the distressed hostess felt wonderfully fortified. There was something in Olivia's presence so intrinsically bracing and reassuring that she would have found herself strengthened by it even apart from the fact that the heiress was a person whom all her other guests would esteem it an honor to be asked to meet; but no doubt this fact was not without its value.

The party was now complete—that is to say, nobody else was expected, and a group of six ladies and six gentlemen were ready to take their places at the dinner-table. Nobody else was expected, for the old friend of the family, John Thwaites, who had been their most frequent guest in bygone days, had not been included in the list of invitations. Mrs. Waters had pleaded hard for him, but her husband had explained that a seventh gentleman would completely dislocate the whole arrangement of the dinner-table, and that it would really be a great deal kinder to ask him some other evening when there were not so many. Then Mrs. Waters, still persisting in her friendship for John Thwaites, had appealed to Emmy for assistance, but Emmy only tossed her head and said it would be a pity to spoil the party for John Thwaites indeed, and Emmy's casting vote had decided the question. And yet now Emmy, looking round at the assembled guests, could not help thinking that the room appeared somewhat blank and bare, and thinking also a little of John Thwaites.

Dinner was presently announced, and after a little floundering, for the host and hostess were too new to their office to manage matters faultlessly, the company were duly paired off and marched into the dining-room. Even there, sit-

tling amidst a glow of plate and wax candles and ladies' jewels, with the gallant Mr. Tovey by her side asking her opinion as to the decorations of the new ball-room—even there Emmy could not altogether keep herself from feeling a little dull and disappointed. Poor John Thwaites—well, it might have been no great harm to invite him, after all.

Probably Emmy was not the only one at that glittering board who found the reality of the entertainment rather flat as compared with anticipation. Whether from an inherent fault in the composition of the company, or from a want of judgment in the pairing-off of the guests, the fragmentary conversation between neighbors necessary to the prosperity of a dinner-party hung fire sadly. Nobody got on quite harmoniously with his or her neighbor. It has been shown that Emmy found even Mr. Tovey's talk about the new ball-room slightly wearisome, and it may be imagined that poor Mrs. Waddilove over the way was yet more wearied by the discourse on high art which Mr. D'Almayne addressed to her for want of a more appreciative listener. Then Mr. Podmore, sitting at Emmy's other side, hardly said a word to her or any body else, in spite of the good-natured attempts made to draw him out by Olivia, to whom he had been assigned as a cavalier. He ate his dinner, he even ate it with more than usual gusto, feeling that it was his only compensation for the trouble of dressing and coming out, but more he could not and would not do. How indeed could he be expected to do more with the man Frisby sitting opposite to him—a low pettifogger whom it was an insult to ask a respectable solicitor to sit at the same table with? To give Mr. Frisby his due, it must be said that nobody could have acted with more perfect modesty and unobtrusiveness. He was very particular in attending to the wants of the lady next him, Miss Elkins, but he spoke seldom, and then in a low diffident voice which seemed intended as an apology for speaking at all. He evidently desired to efface himself so far as was in his power, and as Miss Elkins was miles away from being a lively young lady he was able to carry out this policy very successfully. The only occasions on which he slightly emerged from the background were when somebody at table said something meant to be in the remotest degree humorous, which he was always sure to hear and laugh at, though softly, very heartily, more especially if by rare chance Mr. Podmore happened to be the speaker. But even this did not disarm Mr. Podmore's wrath.

Under these circumstances things naturally went off rather tamely and heavily. Of course to an experienced host and hostess it would have been easy to start some subject of common interest in which all would have been able to join, and which should have the effect of putting all (except perhaps Mr. Podmore) into good-humor with themselves and others. But Mrs. Waters and her husband were not experienced in the least, and, amid their anxiety that all should turn out well, found that they had more than enough to do in listening to what was said to them by Mr. and Mrs. Elkins, who respectively occupied the places of honor next their entertainers at the two ends of the table. Thus it came to pass that the conversation retained its fragmentary character till dinner was nearly over, and that when a

change was at last made it had the very reverse of a harmonizing effect.

It was Mr. Elkins, who, tired perhaps of being answered in monosyllables by his hostess, made the first move towards generalizing the conversation by asking Austin from the other end of the table:

"Have you had time yet to read the report on the Chorcombe Church School, Mr. Waters? You will find it well worth your attention."

"Mrs. Elkins has just been telling me," said Austin with a deferential glance towards that lady. "Yes, I will make a point of reading it, certainly."

"I am sure you will find yourself well repaid," put in Mrs. Elkins. "And Mrs. and Miss Waters—I hope they will find time to look at it too."

Mrs. Waters and Emmy murmured something or other, and Mr. Elkins resumed:

"The result is undoubtedly gratifying when compared with the smallness of the means. It is not all I could wish, of course—very, very far from it, but considering how scantily supported we have hitherto been, I think we have reason to be satisfied. At least it is a proof of what might be done if sufficient funds were forthcoming."

The reverend speaker looked rather hard at Austin, but before the latter was able to reply Mr. Tovey struck in.

"It will all come in time—all come in time, you may be sure," he said oracularly. "The great mass of middle-class parishioners will gradually become interested—the class which profits by the movement, and which consequently ought to pay for it—and then the thing is done. There are Mr. Dormer's schools at Yeston—you know the Rev. Mr. Dormer, of course?"

Mr. Elkins dryly signified that he did.

"The way they are getting on now is something surprising, and they were in a most discouraging state for years. I have heard a good deal about them, first and last, you see, because of the new school-house. The pride Mr. Dormer takes in that new school-house, to be sure!"

"If the school prospers, I cumber myself little about the school-house," said Mrs. Elkins with some asperity.

"Oh! the school is the principal thing, no doubt," said Mr. Tovey blandly. "Though Mr. Dormer says it is quite wonderful the impulse that has been given to the zeal of parents and pupils by the erection of a building with some little pretensions to architectural fitness."

"If I were Mr. Dormer I would not give much for the zeal evoked by causes so ridiculously inadequate," said Mrs. Elkins sternly. "It seems to me that it is the substance and not the shadow that we ought to consider, and for my part I would not, if I could, change our simple unadorned building" (the school-house at Chorcombe was little better than a big barn) "for that frivolous red-brick doll's house of Mr. Dormer's. Let the children be gathered and taught in a place large enough for the purpose, and I care not what that place is like."

"Oh! of course, if mere utilitarianism is to be the order of the day," responded Mr. Tovey, getting all at once very red in the face. "Only in that case there is nothing to be said but that all art has been a mistake from the beginning of the world."

"Instead of which, art, properly considered, is

simply the most potent popular educator that we have," said Mr. D'Almayne, who had been listening with evident symptoms of impatience. "If the great proprietors of the country could only be brought to understand the boon conferred on a neighborhood by a good collection of old masters, we should in a few years see a general refinement of public taste—"

"At the expense of what I should consider a most culpable waste of private funds," interrupted the clergyman's wife. "Our great proprietors have no business to throw away money on pictures while there are so many unsupported missions to the poor and the heathen."

"A picture-gallery is a mission to the poor and the heathen," rejoined Mr. D'Almayne courageously. "If you could only have been at Llewellyn Court as I was last week, and seen the universal respect in which that family is held all throughout the district—"

"Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn's place, do you mean?" asked Mr. Tovey. "Ah yes! I remember seeing it once—pity the house was such a ramshackle old concern. The greatest jumble of styles you ever saw in your life, Miss Waters."

"That may be or may not," said Mr. D'Almayne with a shrug of the shoulders. "It was the pictures Sir Llewellyn cared about, not the house that held them."

"A very strange inversion of ideas on Sir Llewellyn's part, that's all," said Mr. Tovey, with something less than his usual blandness.

"As for that, it belongs to the old question of the relative claims of pictorial and architectural arts; and seeing that that question has been long ago decided in favor of pictorial—"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Tovey. "There I must venture to disagree with you. What does common sense tell us? Pictures could be done without altogether—are of no intrinsic use whatever; whereas architecture—"

"As you said yourself, Mr. Tovey, there are things not to be decided by the standard of utilitarianism, rather indeed by the opposite. If the architect is to be called superior to the painter because he is more useful, then must the baker and butcher be put before both of them."

As he delivered himself of this argument, Mr. D'Almayne shook back his long dark locks with the air of one who deems his triumph beyond challenge. He had indeed triumphed for the moment, but Mr. Tovey was up again immediately, attacking at another point.

"Well, pictures have been of little enough use to Sir Llewellyn, that's one thing clear; and I suppose he thinks so too, now that they have ruined him."

It was Mr. D'Almayne's turn now to look a little disconcerted, but he also quickly recovered himself.

"Seeing that pictures constituted the only solid part of his property, it is difficult to understand how he can have been ruined by them," was the somewhat sophistical reply. "I am not aware of the exact circumstances which led to Sir Llewellyn's reverse of fortune, but I should say it was much more probably caused by some of those visionary speculations which—"

"Ah! when will people learn that there is only one place where they may lay up their treasures and be afraid of no loss?" said Mrs. Elkins sententiously.

"I don't know altogether about that," remarked Mr. D'Almayne, slightly frowning at the interruption. "He paid a large sum away last year to a local church extension fund which some people seem to think accelerated the catastrophe."

"He was ruined somehow among the lot of 'em, at all events," growled Mr. Podmore, without looking up from a plateful of ice-pudding on which he was engaged.

"He! he!" sniggled Mr. Frisby.

Such is a specimen of the conversation which, once begun, went on, with little or no control from the host and hostess, until at last the time came for Mrs. Waters to give the ladies the signal of withdrawal. It need hardly be said that the poor woman, half stunned between the confusion of so many conflicting sentiments and the responsibilities of her own position, was only too thankful when this point was reached and passed, nor was even Emmy sorry to find the evening so far advanced. For somehow Emmy had not enjoyed herself quite so much as she had expected when she so uncompromisingly voted for the exclusion of John Thwaites.

Perhaps Olivia saw something of Emmy's dissatisfaction, and took it upon herself to guess that John Thwaites's absence might have more or less to do with it. However this may have been, shortly after the move into the drawing-room she found an opportunity of engaging Emmy in a little private conversation.

"Well, Emmy dear!" she said, coming up to where the girl was sitting a little apart from the rest, bending over a portfolio of engravings.

"Well, Miss Egerton?" said Emmy, looking up smiling into her friend's face. As she did so, she remembered that that friend was, though unconsciously, her future aunt, and the idea was so strange that she felt as if she should never get familiar with it.

"We are spending a very pleasant evening. But what has become of Mr. Thwaites? I made sure I should have the pleasure of seeing him."

But though Emmy had just been thinking how dull it was without John Thwaites, she would hardly let it appear to Olivia that she had noticed whether John Thwaites was there or not.

"Mr. Thwaites! Oh! I don't know where he is, I'm sure. I—I rather think he was not asked this evening."

"Not asked! Oh! Emmy, how did that come about? He was not forgotten, I know."

"Oh! well—I can't say—that is, I fancy his name was mentioned. But of course one has not room for every body at one's table."

"I think room ought to have been made for John Thwaites, Emmy."

"I don't see why," said Emmy pouting.

"One would say you thought it impossible for any body to exist without John Thwaites."

Olivia laid her hand kindly on Emmy's shoulder.

"You know very well what I think, dear—of him and of you too. Try to be a little less flinty, Emmy—don't pretend to be more flinty than you are, at least; you will find yourself a great deal happier."

Emmy tossed her head.

"I am very happy already—quite as happy as I ever want to be. And I never had such a charming evening as this in all my life."

Olivia smiled at her, rather sorrowfully, however.

"You won't be advised? Well, well, I won't tease you more just now. There is Mrs. Elkins looking as if she wanted somebody to talk to."

Emmy felt a little sorry when the kind hand was withdrawn from her shoulder, and was half disposed to ask herself whether Miss Egerton's advice might not be worth listening to, after all. But she immediately recollected what a bungle Miss Egerton had made of her own affairs, drifting into an engagement with a returned felon when she might have had her choice of the best gentlemen in the county, and she could not help feeling the force of Miss Egerton's authority considerably weakened. Miss Egerton was no longer a person to be altogether looked up to, but to be a little pitied as well. Poor dear Miss Egerton!

Soon after this the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, and another stage of the evening was entered upon. Concerning this stage there is not a great deal to relate. The guests grouped themselves about the room as best they could, talking much the same kind of talk as they had talked before, and displaying much the same individual tendencies—if any thing, developed and intensified by a good dinner. That is to say, Mr. D'Almayne was perhaps slightly more eloquent about high art, Mr. and Mrs. Elkins a trifle more zealous about their schools and missions, Mr. Tovey a little more energetic in criticising architectural shortcomings, and Mr. Podmore a shade sulkier. In the same way, it may be added, Mr. Frisby had become, if possible, yet more retiring and unobtrusive. It would indeed be difficult to do justice to the propriety of this gentleman's demeanor. While others—the D'Almaynes and Toveys and Elkinses—showed a disposition to monopolize the attention of their host, and even to elbow each other in a gentleman-like manner out of the way, Mr. Frisby kept himself so studiously in the background that probably it did not occur to one of these to regard him in any sort as a rival.

And yet Mr. Podmore was still unsoftened. Grimly and sternly, speaking no word to any one, he stalked about the room, examining the water-colors on the walls severely through his gold eye-glass; grimly and sternly he drank down three cups of tea; and, this done, more grimly and sternly still did he go through the ceremony of leave-taking with his entertainers and those others of the party with whom it pleased him to acknowledge an acquaintanceship. But among those was not Mr. Frisby, whom he passed on his way to the door without recognizing him by so much as the quivering of a muscle.

It was evident that poor Mr. Frisby both noticed and felt the slight. He happened to be standing near the door when Austin returned to the room after seeing Mr. Podmore out, and, as he caught his host's eye, shook his head, though meekly, very sadly.

"It is strange what I can have done to give Mr. Podmore such offense, is it not, sir? That is the way he always treats me."

"It is a confoundedly rude way, then," said Austin, who on his own account was disposed to resent Mr. Podmore's behavior not a little.

"It is rather rude for one professional man

towards another, I must say. And what can be the cause of offense I have really no idea. I happen to have been successful in one or two little cases lately which I have had to conduct against Mr. Podmore, but that can hardly be called a fault, can it now, sir?"

"Certainly not, but only a misfortune—Mr. Podmore's misfortune, eh?" said Austin, laughing at his own wit.

"He! he! he! Excuse me, sir, but how very good! And then I fancy perhaps I may have offended Mr. Podmore with reference to this scheme of the Beacon Bay railway; he is very much opposed to the project, you are aware, whereas what little influence I possess—By-the-way, I heard something about that matter the other day that I think might interest you, only with so many in the room I don't exactly like—I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes in private? Oh! not just now, but when every body has gone away and you are quite at leisure."

"You are very kind, Mr. Frisby. If it does not inconvenience you to wait so long—"

"Don't mention such a thing, sir—only too happy, I am sure."

And, falling obsequiously back, Mr. Frisby instantly relapsed into his former obscurity. There he continued to remain, undistinguished and unenvied, till the conclusion of the evening, nobody suspecting that during those few seconds of low-toned conversation with the master of the house he had performed a stroke of business with which he was eminently gratified.

The conclusion of the evening arrived in due time, Olivia and Mrs. Waddilove being summoned away by the announcement of Miss Egerton's carriage, and the Elkinses following shortly afterwards. When these had departed, Mr. D'Almayne and Mr. Tovey still lingered a little while, neither liking to go away leaving the other behind him, but not bestowing a thought on the modest Mr. Frisby, who was demurely hanging about the room as though lacking courage to make his adieux. At last Mr. Tovey looked at Mr. D'Almayne, and remarked that it was very late; and Mr. D'Almayne, understanding that a compromise was the best policy, agreed with him, and the two went away together. Probably they scarcely noticed that they left Mr. Frisby hanging about the room still.

"Come and have a cigar in the smoking-room before you go, Mr. Frisby," said Austin carelessly, for somehow he did not wish his wife and daughter to think that an interview with the lawyer had been pre-arranged.

"You are very good, sir. I shall be most happy."

And then, having politely taken leave of the ladies, Mr. Frisby followed his entertainer to the smoking-room.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MR. FRISBY GIVES ADVICE GRATIS.

"Do you prefer mild or full-flavored?" Was Austin's first question on finding himself alone with his guest. He did not forget that he had come to the smoking-room in order to hear something about the Beacon Bay railway, but, impatient though he was to hear what that something

might be, he felt himself restrained by the etiquette of hospitality from plunging directly into the subject.

"Mild, if it is all the same to you, please, sir," answered Mr. Frisby; and indeed, from the gentle humility of his manners, one would have said that nothing could be mild enough for him.

"Then here are some that I think you will find very choice: some that I picked up a bargain, to tell you the truth, while I was staying at the Brown Bear—a tobacconist's traveller, who sold me a box quite as a favor."

"They are beautiful large ones indeed, sir."

"Yes, I think they look good, don't they? And now I will just ring for something, and then we shall be quite comfortable. Take a chair, Mr. Frisby, pray."

Mr. Frisby lingered an instant till Austin should be ready to join him, and then both seated themselves simultaneously, and set about lighting their cigars. In another minute the something had been brought, and host and guest were left together, secure from all further interruption. Austin thought the time had come for satisfying his impatience.

"By-the-way, about that Beacon Bay railway—I think you said you had something to tell me—"

"Ah yes! to be sure. Well, it isn't very much, but it is satisfactory as showing how certain the thing is to be done. It was just this: I was in company with one of the directors the other day—you will excuse me from mentioning names, I am sure—and somebody happened to allude to the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and—well, in fact (you know how people will talk, Mr. Waters), there was a little speculation as to what the price might have been. So I said I had heard a hundred and fifty thousand, and somebody remarked wasn't that rather dear, but this gentleman—the director, I mean—just shook his head and smiled, and said it would have been cheap at three times the money. That looks as if the Board had pretty well made up their minds, doesn't it, sir?"

If Austin had been less pleased with the drift of this anecdote than he was, it might have occurred to him that the story was neither so long nor of so confidential a character as to necessitate a private interview for its narration. But as it was, he thought of nothing except his own gratification in hearing his most sanguine calculations thus justified.

"I always knew it would turn out well," he said, after a sip of brandy and water. "I was never such a fool as to let myself be frightened—no, not for one half-minute, I can tell you."

"I should think not, indeed, sir. In fact I don't know who ever was frightened about it, unless, perhaps, Mr. Podmore, and that can only have been at a time when he happened to be abnormally nervous."

"Abnormally nervous! He's always abnormally nervous," grumbled Austin, puffing fiercely at his cigar.

"For my own part I must confess that I never had but one opinion on the subject, and that was that the Beacon Bay estate was just the investment for a man of property and position to make. Of course it is a lock-up of capital for the time being, we all know that; but then some people can afford to lock up capital; and even if they

could not, it is so easy in these days to balance any temporary decrease of income in one direction by an increase in another, that really it comes to much the same thing."

Mr. Frisby ceased, and smoked away gently for a few seconds, during which he turned his keen black eyes once or twice observantly towards his companion, as though expecting something in the way of reply or remark. But Austin was too much occupied with his own thoughts to give any other answer than a muttered "Of course;" and, after waiting a due time, Mr. Frisby went on again:

"Yes, that's my view of it, and always has been. I have heard some people say that with so much capital locked up it would be impossible for the remaining income to stand the drain of the outlay necessary to make the purchase productive, but I have always answered: 'Sir, that just proves that you don't understand what an elastic thing, nowadays, income is.' Not that I blame them for that, of course, for perhaps nobody but a lawyer in full practice, with golden opportunities of investment constantly passing through his hands, can properly understand it."

Austin looked rather puzzled, but still did not answer. After a few meditative puffs, Mr. Frisby once more resumed:

"But then people ought not to talk about things they don't understand, ought they, sir? There was a gentleman in my office this morning saying the most absurd things on this very subject—it made me quite angry to hear him—that you hadn't half capital enough to make the speculation pay, or some rubbish of that sort. So I just told him plainly: 'Sir,' I said, 'you don't know what you are speaking about. Mr. Waters's property came to him, I believe, tied up in the Three Per Cents and guaranteed railway stock'—it was rather a liberty of me to talk so, perhaps, only I was so nettled at the time I really could not help it—'but,' I said, 'you may depend that Mr. Podmore has by this time given him advice as to investments which has had the effect of doubling or trebling the returns. Mr. Podmore may be a little uncertain in his temper, but I am positive that no feeling of personal pique would prevent him from doing his duty to a client under all circumstances.' I spoke out so plainly that I am afraid the gentleman was a little offended with me, only it is always best to speak one's mind, I suppose."

Again Austin muttered "Of course," but did not immediately say any thing more. He understood now what was meant by elasticity of income, and felt much interested in the subject, yet was restrained from following it up at once by a notion that there would somehow be a theoretical imprudence in holding a conversation about investments with an attorney of Mr. Frisby's dubious professional and social standing. There was therefore a pretty long silence, which, however, gradually began to suggest to Austin that, as Mr. Frisby was evidently willing to let the topic fall through, its imaginary dangers must be wholly non-existent. And then besides, was not forewarned forearmed? So, taking another sip of brandy and water while he collected his ideas, he guardedly remarked:

"Not that Mr. Podmore ever did give me any advice of the kind, you know."

Mr. Frisby was manifestly surprised.

"Did he not, sir? Oh! but he will, you may depend upon it he will. He is a little out of sorts just now about this Beacon Bay business, but I am certain he is not the man to let his temper stand in the way of a client's interests. With every thing going up so fast as it is, too—oh! you may be sure he will, and lose no time about it either."

"I'm pretty sure he won't, though."

"Excuse me, Mr. Waters, I can feel no doubt about it. I will tell you what may have been the cause of delay hitherto; Mr. Podmore, belonging rather to what we may call the old school, may be a little less in the way of hearing of opportunities than solicitors in a more modern line of business, and it naturally takes him longer to look out. But the best that he can do he will do, I am confident."

"But I tell you I know he won't," said Austin impatiently, for this defense of Mr. Podmore was very provoking to him. "He doesn't approve of such things, or pretends not. I was talking to him about it only the other day, and he told me his motto was 'High interest is another name for bad security,' or something like that."

Mr. Frisby elevated his eyebrows half with contempt, half with surprise and almost incredulity.

"A motto I used to write in my copy-books when I was a small boy," he observed. "I declare it is quite refreshing to hear it again, for I don't think I have ever come across it since. But, my dear sir, you are doing Mr. Podmore an injustice, I am sure. He was joking when he said that."

"No he wasn't," said Austin gruffly.

"Oh! but indeed I feel convinced that he must have been. That is a principle completely obsolete now among men of business, I do assure you. The saying may have been true once, I shouldn't wonder, like a great many other Goody Two-shoes sayings we used to write in our copy-books long ago—like the proverb about early to bed and early to rise, for instance—that may have been true once upon a time, perhaps. And indeed I dare say it's true still that early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, but it's quite certain that it don't make him wealthy or wise, because it is precisely the rich classes and the studious classes that keep the latest hours—he! he! And it is the same with the other old saw—an exploded fallacy quite. Oh! take my word for it, Mr. Podmore was joking."

"But damn it, I say I know he was not joking," exclaimed Austin, beginning to lose his temper under the continued contradiction.

Mr. Frisby, quite cowed by this display of impetuosity, had nothing for it but to yield the point.

"Was he not really, sir?" he answered meekly. "Well, well, who would have thought it, to be sure? So far behind the times—it seems so very strange."

And then, having finished his cigar, he sat stirring his brandy and water in contemplative silence. It was getting late; and as for some time nothing further was said on either side, it might have seemed that the opportunity was a good one for going away, or at least for taking the preliminary step towards going away by finishing the brandy and water. But Mr. Frisby did neither.

After a while Austin felt it incumbent on him as host to say something to keep up the conversation, especially after the acrimony with which he had last spoken. And then the conversation really interested him.

"I suppose you are often hearing of some goodish thing in the way of investment, Mr. Frisby," he said with a diplomatically assumed air of indifference, for, as has been shown, he was thoroughly on his guard.

"Oh! well, all lawyers with any practice hear more or less of such things, of course," said Mr. Frisby modestly.

"And now what kind of things may they be?" went on Austin, still with the same appearance of carelessness. "Can't you give us one or two examples?"

He was afraid just at first that he might have gone a little too far, but he was instantly relieved by the answer, and made slightly self-reproachful as well.

"You must excuse me there, if you please, sir. Nothing could afford me more pleasure than to serve you in any way in my power, but I could not bear to do any thing that might seem invidious to Mr. Podmore. Mr. Podmore, it appears, disapproves of all but old-fashioned speculations; and Mr. Podmore being your professional adviser—"

"Never mind Mr. Podmore," said Austin surlyly. "And, let me tell you, I'm not tied to Mr. Podmore or any body else as a professional adviser, as you call it."

"Oh! sir, but I hope you have no idea—"

"Never mind that. Come, Mr. Frisby, you can give a plain answer to a plain question, surely. What is your notion of a good investment at the present moment?"

"Well, as you insist," said Mr. Frisby, reluctantly. "But really it is a very difficult question to answer. There are so many good things in the market—what I should call good things, at least. There is the Madagascar Canal Company, paying fourteen per cent., with the guaranty of the native Government; and there is the Otaheite Gas, with a paid up capital of fifty thousand, and ten per cent., shares doing at eighty-four and a quarter ex div. Then there is the Posthumous Insurance Company, on the new principle of payment of premiums by survivors after getting their money, instead of by poor devils beforehand who know they will never live to get it at all—a very good idea, and certain to take with the public; and there is the Sahara Irrigation Company, and the Palace of Art Company—all first-class undertakings, thoroughly sound and highly remunerative."

"I am much obliged to you for your information," said Austin warily. "I am not thinking of any thing of the sort just now exactly, you understand, but a few facts never come amiss, do they? Let me see, would you favor me with the names again?" here he produced a note-book and pencil.

The lawyer once more enumerated his list of desirable investments, which Austin duly jotted down. The note-book was on the point of being put up again, when Mr. Frisby subjoined, speaking very slowly and hesitatingly, as though the words were being dragged from him against his will:

"These are all pretty good things, sir, but I

would not say that they are the very best I know of. I will not deceive you—there is something better than any of these— But we will say no more about it, if you please. I just thought I would mention the subject, so that if you should ever hear any thing about it afterwards you might not think I had said that which was not.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Austin, looking at him rather suspiciously. “If you know of any thing better, why didn’t you tell me at first?”

“Because I am not sure how far I am justified— Forget that I ever said a word about it, if you please, sir. These other investments are all of a very superior character, I do assure you.”

“What the devil— Come, I didn’t mean that, but seriously you must be a little more explicit. This is not treating me well, really it isn’t.”

“I feel it is not, but still— Oh dear! I must explain now, I suppose. The fact is, Mr. Waters, in this concern to which I am alluding there are only a limited number of shares remaining to be disposed of; and as I have one or two clients just now for whom I have promised to look out first-class investments, I feel it would be hardly fair to recommend to any one else—”

“Well, but this wouldn’t be recommending exactly. I only want you to mention the particulars, just to give me an idea of things, you know.”

But Mr. Frisby shook his head, and murmured something about “duty.” Austin thus persistently balked, began to wax very resentful.

“Upon my word, this is infernally unreasonable,” he exclaimed testily.

The mild Mr. Frisby winced—it was as though he had not courage to confront Austin in his wrath.

“Don’t say that, Mr. Waters. Well, if it is really to offend you, I suppose—after all, one has a right to consult one’s own feelings sometimes, and, as you say, this is not like a recommendation. What I was referring to, then, was the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, Limited, starting with a paid-up capital of eight hundred thousand, and guaranteed dividend of fifteen per cent. There are a few shares not yet allotted—a thousand or so, I fancy; hundred-pound shares, with twenty pounds to pay up on each—about twenty thousand pounds’ worth altogether, that is, yielding a net income to a purchaser or purchasers of three thousand a year at the least, fifteen per cent. being the minimum dividend. Some people talk of thirty, but I don’t suppose any thing like that will come just for the first year or two.”

“And are you sure it is quite safe?” said Austin, looking a good deal impressed.

“Safe! it is simply the safest thing I ever came across. And then it is limited liability, you know.”

“Ah! to be sure,” said Austin pensively. “So if the worst came to the worst—”

“If the worst came to the worst, one couldn’t lose more than the value of one’s own shares. But you wouldn’t talk of the worst coming to the worst if you knew the principles on which the undertaking is based. I have seen a good deal

of business, first and last, and I may safely say I never met any thing so completely commending itself to my judgment. Perhaps you might like to look at the prospectus, sir. I think I have one somewhere.”

And after a little fumbling the lawyer produced from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he deferentially handed to Austin, adding:

“May I beg that you will kindly keep the document strictly under lock and key? There are some clients of mine with whom I might get into serious difficulty if they had any suspicion of that prospectus reaching you through my hands. They might fancy it was in the way of recommendation, whereas I am sure you quite understand, Mr. Waters, that I am only showing it to you as a kind of standard of what a good investment ought to be—as a kind of ideal rather, for I don’t suppose there is any other at present quite equal to this one. You do entirely understand, do you not, sir?”

“Oh! entirely,” said Austin, and then applied himself to the study of the prospectus.

Here again, one might have thought, was a good opportunity for Mr. Frisby to take leave. He had said what he had originally been asked into that room to say; he had enjoyed a high-priced cigar, and a tolerable allowance of brandy and water; he had moreover repaid these hospitalities by a great deal of useful information; and what more could he have to wait for? But nevertheless Mr. Frisby did wait.

Austin spent some time over the prospectus. It was a very glowing one, and he could not help being considerably struck, not to say absolutely convinced, by its arguments. Still he had not lost sight of the necessity of prudence in matters connected with business, and resolved to proceed, if he proceeded at all, very cautiously. He laid down the paper with great deliberation, and, having gained yet further time for himself by replenishing his now empty glass and pushing the tray towards his friend, he demanded thoughtfully:

“Supposing now I had any idea of this investment for myself—not that I have at present, you know, not in the least, but there is no saying what I might take into my head after a few days for consideration and consultation with friends—just supposing I did think of such a thing, you could undertake to manage it for me, no doubt?”

Mr. Frisby was for a moment quite bewildered with surprise.

“I! For you, do you mean, sir? Dear me! I am quite ashamed of looking so stupid, but I was so unprepared— Well, as you ask, I must answer of course, but I am afraid— You must excuse me, sir, if you please; the more I consider the matter, the more I see it won’t do. For myself I should be only too happy to serve you, but then only think of the construction that Mr. Podmore might put upon it. I could not bear any appearance of meddling between another professional gentleman and one of his clients.”

“Bother Mr. Podmore!” wrathfully commented Austin, on whom the very name was beginning to have an irritant effect; “let him put what construction on it he likes. And as for my being one of his clients, why, if he don’t mind what he’s about I shan’t be one of his clients long, that’s all.”

"Oh! Mr. Waters, nothing could grieve me more than to hear—"

"Come, let's have no more nonsense about that. Are you willing to oblige me in this little matter, or are you not?"

Mr. Frisby, thus driven into a corner, paused an instant in visible hesitation. Apparently he tried hard to refuse, but could not bring himself to do such outrage to his feelings.

"If you absolutely insist, sir," he faltered at last.

"That's right," said Austin, put into good-humor again by the victory. "Then if within the next two or three days I make up my mind and send you word, it will do, I suppose?"

"I shall be delighted to oblige you, I'm sure. But—but—" Again Mr. Frisby showed symptoms of an inner struggle, in which, however, this time duty seemed to prevail against feeling; for he went on, in firmer and more assured tones: "I have to make one reservation, sir, and that is in case I should in the meanwhile receive prior instructions from one of those clients to whom I have already recommended the undertaking. I could not otherwise feel that I was doing my duty—really I could not, Mr. Waters."

This hitch in the negotiation chafed Austin not a little.

"Pooh! you don't mean that seriously, surely."

"Indeed but I do," said Mr. Frisby sadly, "I could not else be happy in my mind. If a client—one whose interests I am bound to consider as my own—were to come to me with instructions, say for a thousand shares, how could I have the face to tell him that he must wait for the decision of a gentleman to whom I had subsequently mentioned the subject? I could not; it is no use to talk of it. We must just hope that the contingency may not occur; but I will be candid with you, sir, I have no confidence that it will not. The competition is very keen."

Mr. Frisby spoke so firmly that further argument or persuasion was evidently altogether useless. Austin sat silent for a while, endeavoring to get over his annoyance as best he could. It was really extremely provoking, this uncertainty about the completion of an investment which was manifestly the exact thing he had been looking for—the rare advantages of which indeed this very uncertainty conclusively proved. As he reflected on all the chances intervening between him and the golden prize, the conviction grew upon him that one mode, and one only, existed of obtaining it.

"If I gave my order to-night, you would consider I had the prior claim in that case, would you not?"

The words had no sooner left his lips than he was a little dismayed at his own apparent imprudence. Was it not possible that this was the point to which Mr. Frisby had been endeavoring to lead him up? But in the next moment his unworthy suspicions were dissipated like chaff before the wind.

"Sir, you must forgive me, but I must decline to receive instructions on the subject to-night. I feel it to be due to myself that you should not on my suggestion enter into a transaction of so momentous a nature without further time for consideration and inquiry."

"What ridiculous nonsense!" remonstrated

Austin, now quite restored to confidence in Mr. Frisby and himself. "If I am satisfied, I think that ought to be enough for you."

"I am very sorry, sir, but I can not see it in that light. So unusual a deviation from my ordinary practice—no, you must really excuse me."

"Then let me tell you, Mr. Frisby, you are behaving damned unfair," said Austin, with a burst of natural indignation as he recalled his grievances. "You tell me in one breath that you will let me go to the wall if you get an order from somebody else before I make up my mind—"

"I should be compelled in duty to my clients," murmured Mr. Frisby apologetically.

"And in the next you refuse my order when I am ready to give it you. I say it is infamously unjust."

Mr. Frisby looked rather shaken at this.

"There is something in that, perhaps. Only—"

"Only I'll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, you have no right to let my interests suffer from your absurd scruples. I give you that order, and I expect you to execute it."

The lawyer heaved a resigned sigh.

"I will execute it, then. Yes, I suppose I have no honorable choice. You are sure you really wish it, Mr. Waters?"

"Wish it—of course I wish it."

"And how many shares would you like to have?" asked Mr. Frisby, sighing again. "Not the whole thousand or eleven hundred that are in the market?"

"I don't see why not. Do you mean to say you shouldn't advise it?"

"I should advise it, certainly, under ordinary circumstances. But I am afraid it looks so very invidious, my entering into an affair of such magnitude at so short a notice—"

"Oh! if that's all, never mind that. Buy up every thing you can get, and don't bother your head about any thing else."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Frisby meekly. And then with a depressed air he finished his brandy and water, after which he mechanically looked at his watch.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, rising in great trepidation, "I had no notion of its being so late. I'm sure how I am ever to apologize for trespassing on you so long—good-night, sir—no, no, not another moment. And with reference to that little affair, you are quite certain you will not change your mind?"

"Really, Mr. Frisby, I consider it no complicity—"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I will not breathe another word on the subject. The thing shall be settled for you to-morrow. And now, positively, I must say good-night—no, pray don't trouble yourself, I can find my way quite well."

But the master of the house insisted on seeing his guest into the hall, where, with many friendly adieux on both sides, the final parting took place. As Austin closed the door on his new friend, and thought of all that had been done since they entered the smoking-room together, he experienced a momentary return of the uncomfortable doubts which had already assailed him more than once that evening. There was no question that an important decision had been arrived at with a suddenness which had a *primé*



*facie* appearance of imprudence. Could it be that he had weakly allowed himself to be drawn on—But then he remembered that, so far from having been drawn on, he had had a separate battle to fight at every stage of the transaction, and plainly perceived that it must be all right. The prospectus of the new company was still lying on the table when he re-entered the room, and, remembering the splendor of its promises, he felt not only re-assured but triumphant. He drank off the rest of his brandy and water, and went to bed in an extra cheerful mood.

Somebody else also went to bed in an extra cheerful mood that night. This was Mr. Frisby, and it must be said that for Mr. Frisby's cheerfulness there was good cause. He had secured twenty thousand pounds and upward for the coffers of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, and the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company allowed a commission of ten per cent. to enterprising agents who extended its connection.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MOVING ON.

AUSTIN did not awake next morning in quite the same happy frame of mind in which he had gone to bed. The idea of the twenty thousand pounds' worth of Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan shares which he stood committed to purchase was the first that presented itself to him on opening his eyes, and he was so dismayed at his own precipitation that at first he was almost tempted to wish that that conversation in the smoking-room had not taken place at all. From this extreme state of depression he gradually recovered as he recalled the considerations by which he had been decided; but even when, by a recapitulation of these, he had succeeded in thoroughly convincing his reason of the perfect prudence of the transaction, he still did not find himself so entirely comfortable in his feelings as might have been expected. He had no doubt done quite right in this particular case, but was it not a mistake on abstract grounds to take any important step with so little time for reflection? What would be thought of the proceeding by business men—by Mr. Podmore, for instance? He was so haunted by this question of what Mr. Podmore would think if he knew, that it was perhaps fortunate for his self-complacency that on that very day an interview took place which had the effect of destroying with him for the time being the last vestige of Mr. Podmore's authority.

It happened that some detail of the routine business relating to the winding-up of Uncle Gilbert's affairs took Austin that afternoon to Mr. Podmore's office. The client, perhaps from something of inner doubt and self-distrust, was in a more than usually pliant and courteous mood, but the lawyer was as dry and frigid as it is possible even for a lawyer to be. He seemed at first hardly to understand what Austin could have come about, and, when this was explained to him, remarked stiffly, fingering the while with an air of dignified impatience the rustling leaves of a document on which the visitor had found him engaged:

"Perhaps, Mr. Waters, it would be better for the future that your legal business should be transacted through another channel. The arrangement would be more satisfactory doubtless to yourself, and I confess that it would be much more so to me."

Austin's countenance fell. He had for some time professed to himself and his intimates an utter want of confidence in Mr. Podmore, and had even talked pretty freely of giving him up some day. But notwithstanding his professions of want of confidence, he knew that his present lawyer was the person whom all the rich people and landed proprietors of the neighborhood employed in their legal affairs as a matter of course, and he had not yet been prepared so far to separate himself from the rest of his class as to break through the Podmore connection altogether. And then it is one thing to give up, and another thing to be given up.

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, surely you don't mean—What nonsense, to be sure!" (Mr. Podmore slightly drew himself up.) "A man may ask a person to dinner—just as a private friend, you know—without wanting to take his business out of another person's hands."

"I should prefer it to be as I have said, Mr. Waters, if you please. It is natural that you should feel more confidence in the advice of one whom you regard as a private friend than in any that I can give; and indeed from what I have seen of the very small weight which my opinion possesses with you, I can not but think it a pity for your sake as well as my own that you should trouble yourself to ascertain it."

"What! just because I didn't take your advice about the Beacon Bay estate, do you mean? Come, that is being very hard—upon my word it is. I didn't do it to offend you—you know I didn't; but you may be mistaken in your advice sometimes, like other people, and you can't expect a man out of mere civility to give up an investment that may make him a millionaire half a dozen times over."

Mr. Podmore only answered by a smile—a smile, however, expressive of such sovereign contempt and incredulity that Austin felt his choler stirred at once.

"I can assure you, Mr. Podmore, it is perfectly true. It was only yesterday I was told on the best authority that the railway was quite determined on, and that the Board themselves consider my investment as the very finest ever entered into."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Podmore, raising his eyebrows. "That information somewhat differs from my own, but on your account I am very glad to hear it."

"And pray what may your information be, Mr. Podmore?" demanded Austin in growing indignation.

"As you ask, I heard that at the last meeting of the Board there was a great deal of disagreement on the subject, and that in the end the whole question was adjourned *sine die*. But possibly I may have been misinformed."

"Possibly you may," sneered Austin, for the exhibition of so much obstinacy, ignorance, and folly had fairly broken down his self-restraint; "possibly you may. And possibly the wish may have been father to the thought, Mr. Podmore; possibly you think there will be no rail-

way because you wish that there may be none. Oh! I know very well you have always been against it."

"I am against all things which cost money in the making, and which I don't think have any chance of paying when they are made," said Mr. Podmore, shrugging his shoulders. "But really I must again say that I do not perceive the utility of your asking my opinion on this or any other subject."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Podmore, I really don't see it either."

"I suppose, then, there is nothing more to be said," rejoined the lawyer, with a slight contraction of the brows, but still fingering his papers with calm dignity.

"I suppose not," said Austin, taking up his hat.

He made his adieux with scanty ceremony, and straightway shook the dust of Mr. Podmore's office from his feet, bending his steps homeward in a state of wrath which tended more to restore him to self-satisfaction than perhaps any thing else could have done. And so that absurd old fool persisted in making out there would be no railway, did he? Much he knew about it indeed! Why, had not Mr. Tovey proved over and over again to demonstration that the Beacon Bay Extension would just be the most paying line, or portion of a line, in the kingdom, and was it likely the directors would not understand that was good for them quite as well as Mr. Tovey could do? Then had not Mr. Frisby brought positive information showing that the directors had not only understood their own interests, but were determined to act on that understanding? Had not Mr. Frisby from the first declared the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate the best investment of the age? And Mr. Frisby had no imaginable motive for saying so if he did not think it; on the contrary, the speculation not being recommended by him, his interests seemed rather to lie in undervaluing it—that was quite a conceivable trick, and one which he, Austin, would have seen through in a moment. But instead of that, Mr. Frisby, enlightened man of business and of the world as he was, had hardly been able to find words strong enough to express his admiration of the enterprise. How conclusively this proved his superiority over an old antediluvian like Podmore, with his cant about high interest and bad security, forsooth! Oh yes! it was impossible that any mistake could have been made in taking the advice of such a man in that matter of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan, or in any other. A blessed change indeed to have got rid of a Podmore (only fancy the pompous humbug presuming to turn him off!) and to have secured the services of a Frisby.

And so cheering did Austin find these and similar reflections, that by the time he reached home he was once more in capital spirits.

Sustained partly by his ire against Mr. Podmore, partly by the representations of Mr. Frisby (now regularly installed as the family lawyer), Austin continued to be in more or less good spirits for some days to come. But unusual elation is proverbially apt to be followed by a reaction, and so it was with Austin now. As the excitement of the scene with Mr. Podmore wore off, as Mr. Frisby's conversation began to lose

something of its first novelty, and still no definite tidings were received of the Beacon Bay railway, the jovial tones of the master's voice became day by day less frequently heard in the household at the Laurels, and a certain careworn expression of his face already familiar to his wife and daughter grew perceptibly more habitual and marked. Not that he admitted any cause for anxiety, nor indeed was any new cause for anxiety in existence. It had always been part of Mr. Tovey's reckoning, and consequently of Austin's, that a decision of the directors in favor of the new branch might probably be kept secret till the moment at which it should become necessary to take the first practical steps towards its execution, so as to allow as little time as possible for opposition to organize itself. And yet, though Austin had by no means lost sight of this contingency, and was always insisting that he should not be a bit surprised if he had to wait months for a further scrap of good news, there is no doubt that he was on the constant look-out for such news, and that, if it had come, it would have instantaneously enabled him to shake off the dejection into which he had gradually fallen.

But day followed day, week followed week, bringing no word of the Beacon Bay railway, and Austin's dejection still continued—rather indeed became more and more visible. He said there was nothing the matter with him, but it was evident that he took little or no pleasure in any thing he did.

All through that summer he remained in much the same listless, apathetic state. It was a very busy summer for him, but none of the manifold occupations which it brought seemed to be sufficiently interesting to rouse him to permanent cheerfulness. And yet one would have thought that there was enough going on about him to furnish matter of supreme interest and satisfaction. The plans for the future city of Waterson were fully completed, and such of the works as were already begun were advancing with a rapidity which thrilled Mr. Tovey's bosom with pride and gratification; while nearer home Chorcombe Lodge was developing into a stately pile which more than realized its owner's most ambitious visions. But though Austin duly went over to inspect operations at Beacon Bay as often as he was told that there was any occasion for his supervision, though he could not but understand that every thing was going on there as well as heart could wish, still somehow those visits did not give him pleasure. He could not admire the graceful outlines of the new crescent already beginning to rise from amid a chaos of mud and sand and builders' rubbish, without asking himself when he should hear something of the railway which was to bring down the future population of tenants and lodgers; and though he had an assured conviction that all must and would come right, the question pressed on his brain with a painful weight of anxiety that always made him return from Beacon Bay looking quite ill and miserable. It might have been deemed that the progress of Chorcombe Lodge would at least have been an unalloyed pleasure to him, but such was not the case—brick and mortar at Chorcombe Lodge was too suggestive of brick and mortar at Beacon Bay.

In the midst of this general drooping of his spirits, there was one fact of which he himself

felt that it ought to have a reassuring influence, and yet which from some cause or other altogether failed of that effect. This was the increase of income secured by his investment in the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan. The thorough soundness of this enterprise had been demonstrated to him by Mr. Frisby times without number, while a seat on the Board of Direction, which had been conferred on him at the time of his purchase, gave him, as that gentleman pointed out, the amplest opportunities of watching and controlling the administration of the concern whenever he might feel inclined to do so. Still, so full was he at present of nervous whims and fantasies that he was sometimes almost uneasy for the safety of the twenty thousand pounds and upward which he had paid into the undertaking, and every now and then tormented himself with imagining the straits which, with so much money locked up in the Beacon Bay estate, the loss of even so comparatively moderate a sum would put him to.

So passed the summer for Austin—the first summer of his prosperity. And, as may be supposed, the period which went by so gloomily for the head of the family was not a very lively one for his wife and daughter. Not only was it naturally depressing for them to notice the melancholy which deepened on him day by day; but the diversions which might have tended to raise the spirits of both, and to which Emmy had been looking forward as among the principal privileges of her new position, were from the same cause denied to them. In vain they endeavored to distract him from his cares by suggestions of change of air and scene; he always alleged want of time for so much as a week's absence from home, while all Emmy's hints as to the desirableness of a little social gayety were met by a promise of seeing about it in a week or two, which promise was merely repeated when the date of fulfillment arrived. Thus the days and weeks and months went by—very grandly, it is true, with white-headed footmen to assist at all the family doings and comings and goings, but also rather drearily and monotonously. And though Emmy enjoyed the grandeur, the dreariness and monotony so oppressed her that sometimes, with a weary sense of disappointment and hope deferred, she was fain to confess to herself that this summer, so longingly looked forward to, was the least pleasant of any she had ever known.

At length the summer came to its close—not only the summer properly so called, but the supplementary summer of September and the first half of October, which while it lasts makes the face of nature seem cheerful, in spite of yellowing leaves and shortening light. The decay of the year was a fact no longer to be overlooked, and with the approach of the last days of October a touch of wintriness was already beginning to make itself felt in the crisp atmosphere. At this time it was that an event occurred which had the effect, for a while at least, of restoring something like pleasure to Austin's life.

This was the receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, inclosing a check for fifteen hundred and odd pounds, being the amount of half-yearly dividend on the shares which Austin held in the undertaking. He was very much excited—so much excited

that before he could go to announce the news to his wife and daughter he was obliged to steady his nerves by recourse to a certain cupboard in his library—a cupboard to which he had often had recourse, of late, at times of more than usual excitement. It would almost have appeared, from his agitation, that the punctual receipt of his dividend had taken him by surprise.

He was a long time expatiating to Mrs. Waters and Emmy on his wonderful good-fortune in being an Anglo-Cosmopolitan shareholder, on the first-rate business abilities of Mr. Frisby, who had put him up to the investment, and on the absolute certainty of that other speculation at Beacon Bay, which Mr. Frisby had no less confidently approved, turning out proportionately successful. When he had done descanting thus, he thought of going over to Beacon Bay to see how the works were getting on, but finding that the afternoon was too far advanced for so long an expedition, decided to pay a visit to Chorcombe Lodge instead.

If Austin was already in good spirits, certainly nothing could have been more calculated yet further to raise them than the appearance which Chorcombe Lodge now presented. The mason and carpenter had done their work, so that, though the painting and decorations yet remained to be finished, it was possible to judge of the proportions and general effect of the building as a whole. Very splendid that general effect was, and Austin, contemplating it in his present changed frame of mind, could not but feel pride and satisfaction in the reflection that here was his future home. He examined every thing in great detail, going over the house from cellar to garret, and asking questions and giving instructions with a particularity which quite astonished the workmen, accustomed for months past to nothing more from him than a mere listless and perfunctory show of interest.

After a long time spent thus, he tore himself away, casting many a backward glance while he went down the rubbish-strewed garden path. He was so occupied in taking a last look as he emerged from the garden into the highway, that he was near coming into collision with a person who, happening to have been passing by, had just stopped at the gate, and was eying the new house with an evidently profound, if not somewhat melancholy, interest which prevented him from noticing Austin till the two were close upon each other.

"Why, Mr. Waters!" stammered this person, suddenly discovering who it was that was so near him.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites," said Austin, graciously extending a couple of fingers. "How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you," nervously answered John Thwaites, for it was indeed no other. "I—I hope you are the same, Mr. Waters?"

"Oh! never better in my life," said Austin, with a glance behind.

"I am so glad to hear it, sir. And—and the ladies—they are pretty well, I hope?"

Here the poor fellow felt a blush rising to his face which made him wish to hide himself fathoms deep underground. He might have spared his uneasiness if he had known, for Austin was thinking of the house, and did not trouble himself about John Thwaites's blush.

"The ladies—oh! all right, thank you. So

you were taking a look at the building? And what do you think of it?"

"It is very handsome indeed, sir. One of the handsomest houses I ever saw."

"Well, yes, I think it looks rather well. And if you have not seen it very lately, you notice the difference all the more, of course. Have you been away anywhere this year? It seems a good-ish while since we saw you."

"It is a little time back," admitted John, to whom indeed the "little time" looked a whole age. But on the two or three occasions on which he had ventured to make a call at the Laurels he had been so depressed by the grandeur he found there, and especially by the grandeur of Emmy's reception of him, that he had resolved to consult his peace of mind by making as few as possible of such calls in future. "It is a little time back, but I have not been away—oh no!"

"You must try and look in on us some of these days," said Austin, with an air of more than usual condescension, for, as has been seen, he was in specially good humor.

"Thank you, sir, you are very kind," said John, blushing again, but not feeling very sure whether he would avail himself of the permission.

"Don't mention such a thing, Mr. Thwaites," returned Austin blandly; and so kindly disposed did he feel towards the young man that he went on to multiply his favors. "And at any time that you should wish to see the house in here, I hope you will remember that you have only to apply for admission and use my name; the people will be most happy to show you over."

"Thank you, sir, I—"

"Or stop; it will be better to give you my card. No, I have not one about me just now; but if you like to call for it some day at the Laurels, I will be sure to leave it out. And you may take a friend or two with you if you like, you know."

John bowed awkwardly, and mumbled something that did duty as an acknowledgment. He knew that Mr. Waters's civilities were intended to be very encouraging, but somehow they had a diametrically opposite effect on him.

"Oh! you are quite welcome," said Austin with much urbanity. "And now good-afternoon, Mr. Thwaites, the ladies are expecting me home to dinner."

"Oh, indeed!" said John huskily. "Good-afternoon, sir."

And then, the great man having once more extended a couple of fingers, the two parted, and each went his way, Austin towards his elegant temporary home at the Laurels, John Thwaites towards his plain lodgings in the town. From some cause or other, the poor young man's spirits appeared to have been greatly damped by the interview, and he walked along with his eyes fixed on the ground, and with an expression on his face of even greater melancholy and abstraction than had been there when Austin first accosted him.

He was quite startled when, having gone a little way, he heard a cheerful voice say in front of him:

"Why, Mr. Thwaites, you are not going to pass me, surely?"

At the same moment a slender, delicately-gloved hand was held out (not only two fingers this time), and, raising his astonished eyes, he saw before him Olivia Egerton, looking so bright

and radiant that he hardly recognized her until in an instant more he remembered that she had been always looking bright and radiant lately.

"Oh! Miss Egerton! I beg your pardon," he faltered, while he shyly took the proffered hand.

"So you ought to beg my pardon, I think. I could not have believed you guilty of so unkind a trick."

"I—I did not see you, indeed," apologized John humbly. He was in so downcast a mood that he made no allowance for the possibility of playfulness in any body else.

"Oh! I knew that all the time, of course," said Olivia, and then, struck by the utter spiritlessness of his manner, she looked at him rather scrutinizingly, and added: "You have been quite well all this long while, I hope?"

"Oh yes! quite well, thank you, Miss Egerton."

But still he spoke without an atom of briskness, and again Olivia looked at him scrutinizingly, and this time compassionately as well. She was quite touched by the despondency of his appearance, and, guessing its cause, inwardly resolved to help him so far as in her lay.

"You were going into Chorcombe, I think, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Yes, home to my lodgings."

"And I was going in the other direction, to Egerton Park. I wonder if you would mind turning with me a little way—it seems so long since we met."

"Oh! certainly—of course—with a great deal of pleasure," acquiesced John politely, but it did not look as if he were capable of taking pleasure in any thing.

They walked on a short distance in silence, and then Olivia, observing her companion furtively, asked:

"Have you seen any thing of the Waterses lately? I have not met you there for some time past."

"I—I suppose not," said John with a quivering voice. "No, I have not seen them for a long while—at least—that is—I met Mr. Waters a few minutes ago."

"Mr. Waters? Only Mr. Waters? And did you speak to him at all?"

"A little. He was rather in a hurry—going home to dinner."

The words were uttered in very low sad tones, and Olivia understood something of the character of the interview.

"Mr. Waters is a little changed since he came into his money—don't you find him so?" she asked.

"Yes, rather. But—"

"But we must not mind that, of course; and when we remember all the circumstances, there are really great allowances to be made. All those years of poverty and dependence were enough to spoil any body's character. You must excuse him, Mr. Thwaites."

"Oh! and so I do, I'm sure—so I should, at least, if I had any right to take offense. But then you know I never had any claim—"

"You have the claim of old friendship, and that ought to be a very strong one," interposed Olivia warmly. "But, as I said, there are great allowances to be made for him and all of them. Not that there are any allowances required for

Mrs. Waters, of course—she is perfection, and always has been—but that foolish little Emmy, her head is quite turned; and no wonder either, poor girl! Still I believe the child's heart is in the right place, and we must not mind about the rest."

John murmured something unintelligible in reply, and Olivia saw that his face was scarlet.

"The best way is to let all her little airs pass, and take no notice of them," she went on. "They don't mean any thing, and it is a pity to give them an importance they don't deserve—a pity for her perhaps as well as—for others. For it is my opinion—and I have seen a good deal of her, you must remember—it is my opinion that she would be just the girl to pretend to despise and look down on the very person whom she most liked and respected, and then perhaps to break her heart about him when she had succeeded in frightening him away. So I would not mind too much what she says or does—indeed, Mr. Thwaites, I would not, but just go on as if I thought she meant the very opposite. Do you understand?"

Apparently he had very well understood, for a gleam of joy had flashed over his face which made him for a moment look quite other than he had done just before. But immediately afterwards it died out again.

"You are very, very kind, Miss Egerton," he stammered, bolding his head down as low as possible, for he knew that the words were tantamount to an avowal of his love. "But—but I am afraid—"

"That's just it; you are afraid—a great deal too much afraid. You are every bit as good as she is, and you ought to let her see that you know it; you ought to pretend to know it even if you don't really, and I suppose you don't—the gentleman always regards himself as the inferior being in such cases, of course." Here Olivia stopped short in her Mentorlike harangue, drooping her long eyelashes in sudden confusion, and blushing almost as violently as John Thwaites himself, and beyond doubt a great deal more becomingly. She had just bethought herself of a certain other gentleman at that time thousands of miles away, to whom, he being in one respect very much in John Thwaites's case, her axiom might be held to apply, but how infinitely mistaken was he if he estimated himself so modestly! "Seriously," she continued, recovering herself as well as she could, "you give way to her a great deal too much, and she is a person whom it does not do to give way to. Assert yourself a little, and don't seem as if you were always looking up to her for permission to exist. Will you remember that when you see her next?"

"I will try," he answered, still holding down his head, "when—when I do see her next, that is. But I dare say it will be a long time first; they never ask me now, and I don't like to go to a house where I am not asked."

He sighed deeply, and relapsed into silence. Meanwhile Olivia, compassionating him more than ever, was reflecting how she might best serve him.

"Will you come to my house if you are asked?" she inquired presently.

"Oh, Miss Egerton!"

"Very well, then I shall hope to have a few friends to spend a quiet evening with me one

day next week, and I shall expect the pleasure of your company. I don't name the evening now, because I must find out first which will suit the Waterses. But you will hold yourself disengaged, won't you?"

He was quite overwhelmed by so much kindness, to say nothing of a certain strange commotion about his heart at the idea of once more spending an evening in Emmy's company.

"I'm sure, Miss Egerton, how I am ever to thank you—"

"Then that is quite settled—I will let you know the evening as soon as it is fixed. And now I will not take you a step farther out of your way—no, I insist upon it. Good-bye, I am very much obliged for your escort so far."

She left him, and made her way quickly up the road towards where the scant yellow foliage of the Egerton Park trees quivered wanly in the pale evening light of the October sun. But though she was gone, the consolatory influence of her words remained, and John Thwaites, bending his solitary steps towards the village over fallen autumn leaves that continually rustled as he went, felt in his heart a whisper of hope which seemed like a legacy from the spring.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A CHARADE.

OLIVIA did not forget her promise to John Thwaites—she was too happy herself, not to do her best towards making all others happy likewise. For, in spite of separation from her betrothed, Olivia continued to be in a state of intense beatitude. The knowledge that there was one person in the world infinitely dear to her, and to whom she was infinitely dear in turn, was in itself so supreme a delight that she could have lived on it more or less contentedly even with no exchange of correspondence and with no definite time fixed for a reunion. As it was, however, her lover's letters kept her constantly supplied with news of him, and the last had held out hopes of an almost immediate return to England, in consequence of the unexpected facility with which his affairs had got themselves arranged. So that Olivia was at this time in a seventh heaven of blissful anticipation, but, as has been said, her own happiness only made her all the more anxious to secure if possible that of poor John Thwaites. Accordingly the next time she saw the Waterses (and she made it her business to see them very soon) they received and accepted a pressing invitation to come and spend a quiet evening at Egerton House, when perhaps one or two other friends might be asked to meet them.

The appointed evening came, duly bringing with it Mr. and Mrs. Waters and Emmy, and the one or two other friends likewise, making a party of some fourteen or fifteen in all. The composition of the company seemed simple enough, but it had really been the subject of a good deal of study, arising from Olivia's wish to make the party sufficiently numerous to admit of *tête-à-tête* love-making, and at the same time to invite no one who could by possibility be a rival to the intended hero of the evening.

She had at least succeeded in fulfilling the lat-

ter of these conditions, though she was a little apprehensive about her success with regard to the former. Besides herself and Mrs. Waddilove, the Waters family and John Thwaites, there were, first, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Elkins; secondly, Captain Tomlinson and Miss Tomlinson—an elderly brother and sister who lived in a cottage near Chorcombe on the captain's half-pay, and both much too elderly to be of the smallest danger among young people; and, lastly, Mrs. Jolliffe, the widow of the physician who had been Dr. Plummer's predecessor, with two lively red-cheeked daughters, and a juvenile son of gawky demeanor and long lanky figure for which his clothes were visibly too short. The elements of the party were perhaps rather too much like those of a village tea-drinking, to be quite consistent with the dignity of Egerton House, as Olivia could not help feeling; but then, what was she to do? A dinner-party would have been much too formal an affair for the promotion of the object she had in view, while an evening party or ball would have necessitated the presence of a host of young men who might have edged John Thwaites out of a hearing altogether. And as John Thwaites was the person for whose sake the whole thing had been got up, every thing was made subservient to his interests on the occasion.

The Waterses were rather late in making their appearance (Austin had been hard at work with Mr. Tovey up to the last minute), so that when they were shown into the stately drawing-room at Egerton House, all the rest of the company were already assembled. The new-comers, who were still too inexperienced in social phraseology to know that one or two means at least ten or twelve, were all three rather surprised at finding so many more than they had expected; but especially surprised was Emmy when, having shaken hands with Olivia, she saw rising to greet her a gentleman who turned out to be John Thwaites. She was indeed violently surprised—so much so that in order to conceal the flutter of her nerves, she was obliged to return his salutation with extra stiffness and frigidity.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites, how do you do? Oh! Miss Elkins, I am so glad to see you."

And then, with much effusiveness of manner, she let herself drop into a vacant chair by Miss Elkins's side, while John wandered disconsolately back to the place he had already found for himself quite at the other end of the room. The beginning was certainly not auspicious.

Meantime Emmy, carrying on a specially friendly talk with Miss Elkins, and demurely sipping her tea in the intervals, did not by any means recover herself instantaneously. At the risk of occasional incoherencies in her conversation with Miss Elkins, she could not keep herself from thinking of John Thwaites, and even casting a glance now and then in his direction. Fancy meeting him again after such an age! Above all, fancy meeting him as a guest at Egerton House—Egerton House, where all the best people of the county were invited! Miss Egerton must really see a great deal in him. Well, this evening, at least, there was no denying that he was looking to more than usual advantage. What a long way off he was sitting! One would almost think he was offended—or perhaps it was just because he was so shy. And yet he could not be so very shy either—only look at him starting up

to put down Maria Jolliffe's cup. What a horribly affected girl that was, and how hideously she did her hair! It was impossible any one could admire her. And yet very likely John Thwaites would be sticking in that part of the room all the evening, just because there was no unoccupied chair over here. It would be strange if they were in the room together all evening and never so much as spoke to each other, but it was almost more likely than not. She might have to rise once or twice to go to the piano perhaps, but of course it was not for her to rush about the room after John Thwaites (the very idea, indeed!), so if he did not come to her—What nasty stupid things those tea-parties were!

And in this opinion Emmy continued all the time that tea was going on, and perhaps John Thwaites, ever and anon sending a hopeless glance from the other extremity of the room, was pretty much of the same way of thinking. At length the last cup was laid down, and the hostess got up and held a short parley with Mrs. Waddilove, looking round the room meanwhile as though passing her guests under review. Emmy thought that there was about to be a demand for some music, but instead of this the announcement was made that there was going to be a charade, and that all the young people were wanted as actors.

The two Miss Jolliffes—sprightly girls, up in the theory and practice of every kind of amusement from cards to croquet—at once protested that nothing could be more delightful, and volunteered their services and those of their brother enthusiastically. Emmy had never so much as seen a charade played in her life, and felt rather nervous at the idea of taking a part in the performance, but she was obliged to yield to the representations of Olivia, who declared that she could not possibly be spared. In the same way Olivia managed to overcome the reluctance of John Thwaites, who was as inexperienced as Emmy, and a great deal more diffident of his own qualifications. But Miss Egerton told him that he was absolutely required, and, remembering what she had said on a former occasion as to the necessity of self-assertion, he screwed up his courage sufficiently to consent. There remained to be persuaded only Miss Elkins, and that young lady being of a very stiff and wooden temperament, at first seemed to think the affair altogether beneath her dignity. But even she was eventually coaxed into compliance by the Miss Jolliffes, who, in virtue of an ancient boarding-school companionship, bore themselves on all occasions as her sworn friends and allies, and now took her specially under their protection.

The actors being thus got together, they were marshalled into the old oak library by Olivia in the capacity of manager, and forthwith an animated discussion began as to the choice of a word and the mode of treatment. Emmy, as being utterly unversed in the subject, stood a little apart, in some trepidation as to what might be expected from her, when suddenly her eye caught that of a person standing apart likewise (that is, apart from the main body of the company, for he was almost close to herself), and she fell into greater trepidation than ever, and yet somehow felt slightly reassured too.

"I am quite nervous about it," she informed this person, involuntarily drawing a step nearer

him as she spoke. "I never acted in a charade before, did you?"

"Never," was the answer, made very tremulously, but the tremulousness was by no means altogether due to apprehension on the score of the charade. "I am afraid I am sure to make some dreadful mistake."

"And I am quite positive I shall. Dear me, Mr. Thwaites, what shall we do?"

"I suppose we must just do as we are bid," said John, smiling shyly (ah! how delicious was the use she had empowered him to make of that plural pronoun!). "We shall get through it somehow, no doubt."

"Oh! but I hope they will not give us any thing very difficult. For really and truly I know nothing about charades whatever."

But already Emmy thought charades very pleasant things.

In the mean time the word and its treatment had both been decided upon, and all the resources of the household were laid under contribution for the needful stage properties and costumes. Fortunately former possessors of Egerton House had dabbled more or less in private theatricals, so that there was a very tolerable wardrobe at command, with the aid of which Olivia—who in the first scene was to enact the proprietress of a ham, beef, and sausage establishment, with Master Augustus Jolliffe under her for shop-boy—proceeded to array herself as much in accordance with her part as possible in a coal-scuttle bonnet and red tartan shawl. Then, amid a great deal of merriment, the remaining members of the company, who were to represent a succession of chance customers, got themselves up as characteristically as might be under the circumstances. Emmy laughed prodigiously, and declared to John Thwaites that she didn't know when she had been so amused.

The first scene went off very successfully. On the removal of a screen which divided the drawing-room into auditorium and proscenium, Olivia was discovered standing at her counter with a real ham and a real joint of beef before her, and in her hands a real knife and fork of monster dimensions, with which she gesticulated very effectively while administering a savage lecture to her shop-boy for laziness and general inefficiency. The lecture over, the customers began to appear—first a woman with a pair of pattens in one hand, and a jug and door-key in the other (the eldest Miss Jolliffe), who came for a bit of something for her husband's dinner, and complained bitterly of the trodden-down state of the female sex; next a man with a coal-heaver's hat on his head and a short pipe in his mouth, who wanted a pound of sausages, if you please. This was John Thwaites, and it being his first appearance on any stage, he made the demand in mild, timid tones very inappropriate to the character. He felt the inconsistency himself, and, gathering courage as he went on, ventured to interrupt Olivia as she was putting up in paper the little improvised bundles of brown rag which represented the sausages, by expressing a hope that they were genuine—a sally which was received with immense applause, and was considered quite the hit of the evening. When the coal-heaver had retired amid the plaudits of the company, there entered a maid-of-all-work with a big basket on her arm (the youngest Miss Jol-

liffe), who had a great deal to say of the tyranny of lodgers, and wanted a pork chop. After her came a young lady elegantly attired in silks and laces (this was Miss Elkins, much too dignified a personage to submit to a vulgar disguise), and asked for two ounces of tripe—a demand which created some mirth among the audience, greatly to the surprise of the performer, who had simply said what she had been told to say, without any perception of incongruity. And finally there came a smart little maid-servant, with the neatest and tiniest of caps perched on the top of her head (Emmy), and faltered out a request for two shillings'-worth of ham cut thin for sandwiches, whereat Olivia asked if the missus was going to have a party, and received an answer in the affirmative. Then the screen was put up again, and the first scene declared at an end.

"How absurd it is, to be sure!" said Emmy, when she had got back to the library; and the person she addressed was naturally John Thwaites, all the others being busy discussing the next syllable. "Though it certainly is very amusing. Oh! Mr. Thwaites, it was so funny to see you in that hat, you can't think. Did you feel at all nervous? But you really got through your part capitally, and what a good thing that was you said, and how it made them all laugh! I can't imagine how you came to think of it; I felt as if I couldn't have said any thing out of my own head."

"I'm sure you did your part most beautifully, Miss Emmy," said John, blushing crimson at such compliments from such a quarter.

"Did I?" said Emmy, giving a shake of her little head which nearly shook off the neat cap. "Oh dear me! here I am with this thing on still— isn't it ridiculous? I suppose I am the oddest-looking figure, am I not?"

He surveyed her admiringly—so admiringly that she began to blush in her turn—and seemed about to make a very gallant answer, when the pair were called upon to take their instructions for the next scene, the programme of which had now been decided.

"I am to be a frugally-minded lady, who, wishing to go to the sea-side, resolves to let her house furnished during her absence," said Olivia, "and now we have got to think how my household is to be constructed. Let me see, the Miss Jolliffes have so much humor, and do so excel in soubrette characters, that I must positively secure them for cook and housemaid; these are always the most difficult parts, and need the best acting. Then there must be a page, of course, with buttons all the way down—oh! you will do that, Mr. Augustus, won't you? And you will be a young lady visitor, perhaps, Miss Elkins, and then there will be no trouble about altering your dress. And now let me see," she went on meditatively, "we must have a lady and gentleman to come after the house—oh! of course Mr. Thwaites and Miss Waters will do that," she added, with a semi-triumphant air, as though she had only just thought of them. "You are to be Mr. Snoggins, if you please, Mr. Thwaites—Mr. Samuel Snoggins—and you are to be Mrs. Snoggins, Emmy; mind you don't forget the name."

"Oh! but I am sure I shall," said Emmy, pouting, yet apparently not altogether displeased. "Snoggins!"—(she did not like to say Mrs. Snoggins, considering who Mr. Snoggins was to

be)—“what a ridiculous name, to be sure—and then such a silly part— Oh! upon my word I think somebody else had better do it.”

“But you see, dear, all the rest have got their parts already. Come, you really must oblige us.”

“Oh yes! Miss Emmy, you really must,” put in John Thwaites in a pleading whisper.

“Oh! well, I suppose I must,” said Emmy, still pouting, but blushing very much at the same time. “Only it is so very, very absurd, you know.”

Things being thus arranged, the necessary preparations were made, and the second scene began. Olivia, in the character of the frugal-minded lady, was discovered in the midst of her household, announcing her determination to let her house during her stay at the sea-side, and instructing her servants how to answer any intending tenant who might privately question them as to damp or black beetles, the existence of which they were strenuously to deny. While this was going on in the room, Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were waiting outside, ready to enter on a signal from one of the actors; and as the Miss Jollifesses threw themselves into the spirit of their parts with great zest, and were very eloquent on the subject of board wages, the signal was a long time in coming.

“I am getting so nervous again,” whispered Emmy, as they thus waited. “I am so much afraid of making some mistake.”

“Oh no! you won’t, Miss Emmy. You remember the name, I hope?”

“Snoggins?” said Emmy, blushing.

“Yes, and my name is Samuel. By-the-way, you must be sure to call me Sam once or twice.”

He was almost afraid that his new-found courage had carried him too far, but instead of looking disdainful, as he had feared, she only blushed a little more, and toyed with her bracelet while she murmured that she didn’t think it would be necessary to call him any thing. That thrice-blessed charade—how it seemed to have broken down the wall between them!

“I wonder how we ought to go in,” he said presently, getting bolder and bolder with his impunity.

“How we ought to go in?” said Emmy. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, ought we to go in arm in arm? Don’t you think—?”

But Emmy hastily declared that there could not be the least occasion for such a thing. Still, however, she was not angry, for a moment afterwards she begged him to be kind enough to tell her if her bonnet was quite straight.

Just as he was looking to see, the appointed signal was made, and they had to enter in a great hurry, and in such confusion that the double knock that was to have announced them was quite forgotten.

The scene was got through somehow—rather lamely, it is to be feared, so far as Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were concerned, but each was too much fluttered to take note of the shortcomings of the other, and the party returned to the library.

Here Olivia announced that the last act of the charade was to consist of a dumb-show representation of the scene in which Hamlet, accompanied by Horatio and Marcellus, first sees his father’s ghost.

“As the thing is to be in dumb-show,” she pursued, “it does not matter much how we distribute the parts. Mr. Thwaites will be Hamlet, of course; but as our only gentleman will be wanted for ghost, we must just be contented with ladies for Horatio and Marcellus; with long cloaks and plumed hats they will do very well. Emmy, dear, just try on that cloak, and see if it covers your dress sufficiently—oh yes! that will do nicely. And perhaps you will be kind enough to take the other part, Miss Jolliffe—only first you must please come and help to make up your brother as ghost. The ghost is to be the grand feature of the scene, and we must lavish all our resources on him.”

And then Olivia and the Miss Jollifesses, and ostensibly Miss Elkins (only she was not of much use), all put their heads together as to the manner in which the unfortunate Augustus was to be plastered and beflowered into the likeness of a theatrical ghost, the victim submitting himself with the uncomplaining meekness and deference to his sisters’ commands which he had shown all through the evening’s proceedings. Meantime Emmy and John Thwaites, already dressed for their parts in long cloaks and melodramatic hats with enormous plumes, stood a little apart from the rest, waiting for their services to be required, and both feeling in a state of extreme flurry, as was perhaps only natural, considering the novelty of their position.

“It is all dreadful nonsense, certainly,” remarked Emmy in low tones as she stood casting about for something to say, “and yet somehow it is great fun too. I really have enjoyed it rather, haven’t you?”

“Enjoyed it, Miss Emmy! I don’t know when I have enjoyed any thing half so much. Not for a great, great many months,” he added, with a sigh, for he was getting very courageous, and thought he saw a way of improving the occasion.

“Really,” said Emmy, in tones still lower, while she gave a little adjusting shake to the folds of her cloak. “I am afraid, then, you must have been spending rather a dull time of it.”

“I have indeed,” he made answer dolefully, “and a great deal worse than dull. I have been very, very miserable.”

“Dear me! I am sorry to hear that,” said Emmy, in a voice which would have sounded wonderfully unconcerned if it had not trembled so. “And pray what has it been owing to?”

“Can you not guess, Miss Emmy?”

But Emmy, looking very hard at the floor, and speaking almost in a whisper, declared that she had not the slightest idea.

“Don’t you know that I have only seen you three times to speak to since you came home from Nidbourne? And don’t you think that that is enough to make me miserable?”

Emmy murmured something quite inaudible.

“Yes, only three times to speak to,” he went on; “and then, oh! how cold and distant you were—it made me more miserable than if I had not seen you at all. And four times to bow to you out of doors—and once, last Thursday week, I saw you in a shop as I was passing by on the other side of the street; but you were standing with your back to me, and never looked round.”

“If I never looked round, how do you know



it was me at all?" said Emmy, with a quivering little laugh.

"How did I know? I can't tell, but it was you, I will swear to that. And I can tell you this, Miss Emmy, if I saw the folds of your dress, yes, or so much as the end of one of your ribbons half a mile off, I should know it was yours among a thousand."

"Dear me!" said Emmy faintly, pulling her broad-brimmed hat a trifle farther on her brows. "And yet I am sure my ribbons are just like other people's."

"Not to me!" he asseverated eagerly.

"Oh! what nonsense, Mr. Thwaites, I am sure they are. They almost all come out of the draper's shop at Chorcombe, so there really can be no difference, you see," argued Emmy, affecting to misunderstand him.

"Oh! Miss Emmy, you know what I mean. Any thing of yours is different from other people's in my eyes. Any thing you have worn or looked at even is made precious to me from that moment forth."

He was getting quite poetical in the ardor of his feelings.

"How can you say such things?" murmured Emmy. "Just as if you could think a strip of colored silk precious!"

"Don't I though!" he responded wartyly. "If you had worn it, I would treasure up a strip of colored silk all my life long—if I had the chance."

There was a pause, and then, in a voice that trembled more than ever, Emmy said:

"Of course I know what to think of that—all gentlemen say such things to ladies. But they would throw away the ribbons directly the ladies were out of sight."

"I would keep yours next my heart for ever and ever," he protested.

She was silent again for a while, and then suddenly (somewhat to his discomfiture, for he thought he might have gone too far) changed the subject by once more remarking what very foolish things charades were.

"It does seem so silly dressing up like this, does it not? You look so funny, Mr. Thwaites, and so do I, I am sure."

"Oh no! indeed, on the contrary—"

"Oh! but I know I do—with a great immense cloak like this on, only fancy! And the stupid thing doesn't fasten all the way down—it will be sure to fly open and show my dress."

"It won't signify much if it does," said John consolingly. "The dress being black, nobody will notice it."

"Oh! if it was only the dress, of course not, but it is trimmed with mauve all down the front—only look at that great staring bow at the bottom; it is certain to show." She considered the offending bow for a moment in apparent ruefulness, and added: "I declare I will cut the thing off—it will spoil all the illusion."

"Couldn't you pin the cloak over it?" said John; "it seems almost a pity—"

"Oh! the pin would be sure to come out. Have you a penknife about you, Mr. Thwaites?—look, there is only a thread or two to cut through; those dressmakers fasten things on so badly."

As she spoke she held the threads stretched out so that he might cut them. He did so, and

the bow, a knot of violet ribbons, fell to the ground. He instantly picked it up and presented it to her; but instead of putting it into her pocket, as he had expected, she tossed it carelessly on to a chair. At that instant—whether or not in consequence of any peculiarity in her manner he did not stay to consider—his mind was illumined as by a sudden inspiration.

"May I keep it? Oh! Emmy, do you mean me to keep it?" he exclaimed, betrayed by the tumult of his feelings into forgetfulness of all ordinary forms of address.

She did not answer, but on looking into her face, now flushed from brow to chin, he saw a certain quivering about the corners of her mouth which told him that he had not been mistaken.

He took up the fluttering ribbons and pressed them to his lips again and again; but though these demonstrations dyed her cheeks, if possible, deeper still, she did not attempt any expostulation, perhaps because she had no energy for expostulation left. Her senses were in a kind of maze which made every thing about her seem unreal and dreamlike. Only she was very glad to know that every thing was quite real.

Emmy never very well knew how the remainder of that evening was spent. She had a dim remembrance next day of walking through her part in the Hamlet scene, with John Thwaites close to her all the while, and then of re-appearing in the drawing-room in her own character, and receiving sundry rather embarrassing compliments on her impersonation of Mrs. Snoggins. She was aware also that there had been some music, and that John Thwaites had never taken his eyes off her all the time she was playing, also that he had escorted her in to supper, and that they both had been very silent, except once when he found an opportunity of whispering something about the ribbons, and how he would never, never part with them. And then she had a confused, though very deeply graven, recollection of a certain pressure of the hand she had received just as she was stepping into the carriage after her mother—a pressure which still seemed to electrify her whole frame as she thought of it. And finally she knew that the evening had altogether been the very pleasantest she had ever spent.

Decidedly Olivia had understood what she was about when she proposed to get up a charade.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A NEW TURN.

FOR the next two or three days Emmy moved about in a sort of dream. She bore her part as usual in the little details of household daily life, but her thoughts were in nothing that she did, and, instead of occupying themselves with the business of the present, were confusedly wandering amid recollections of the past, or more confusedly yet, amid vaguely imagined potentialities of the future. So absorbing were the reveries to which she thus gave herself up, that she was scarcely aware of the little adjuncts of new-found grandeur in which she had hitherto taken such delight, while even such matters as the progress of Chorcombe Lodge and the prospects of the future town at Beacon Bay had all at once become of quite minor importance in her eyes.

From this unwonted state of apathy she was roused one morning very abruptly. Her father, neglecting his breakfast, as he often did neglect it in those days, was poring over his newspaper—his newspaper was more interesting than ever to him, now that the usual November notifications of projected railways were beginning to appear—when he suddenly uttered a stifled cry, and the paper shook violently in his hand.

"Austin!" exclaimed Mrs. Waters anxiously, "what is the matter?"

He looked up from the paper, and his wife and daughter, observing him intently, saw that his face had become deadly pale.

"The Beacon Bay line—" he began in thick, hurried accents, and then stopped, unable to say more, while the blood rushed back to his face till his brow and his very temples were suffused with purple.

"It is not to be, then?" said Mrs. Waters soothingly. "Oh! Austin dear, never—"

"But it is to be," he broke in vehemently.

"It is advertised to-day, and the bill is to be brought before Parliament next session. The line will be open for traffic within two years, and I shall get back all my money and ten times more. Didn't I always tell you so, didn't I? Look, here it is in black and white, if you don't believe me."

He pushed the paper towards his wife, who indeed was scarcely yet able to realize the fact that it was joy rather than disappointment which had been the cause of so much agitation. But a glance sufficed to show her that the fact was really so. The intention of the directors to come before Parliament with a bill for a new branch railway from Chorcombe to Beacon Bay was officially notified to the public in a long advertisement setting out at full length the plan of the proposed line, the expected time of opening, and every other detail of the project. Thus had Austin's most sanguine calculations been so far abundantly verified.

"Didn't I tell you?" he repeated triumphantly, "didn't I tell you? You see I was not such a fool as perhaps you thought me, and Tovey and Frisby were not such fools either. Oh! I always knew it would come right, I never doubted it for a moment—never really doubted it, that is. That old ass of a Podmore! what he has made me go through! And now it has come right, you see, and I am the richest man in the county—yes, and to be one of the richest in the whole kingdom some day, only wait a little. And if I am the richest man in the county, mind, my wife is the richest lady, and my daughter the richest heiress, and they are to hold their heads up as if they thought so. Eh, Agnes! eh, Emmy! what do you say?"

"Dear papa, of course it is delightful," said Emmy, getting up to kiss him.

But though Emmy was unquestionably very much pleased, she was not quite so exultant as she probably would have been if the good news had come a few days earlier. For somehow since that pleasant evening at Olivia's she had got into the habit of mixing up John Thwaites very much in her estimate of things and events; and when, according to this unconscious habit, she thought of John Thwaites with reference to this new accession of fortune, she could not help feeling that the tidings would put him to more or less pain.

She was a little sorry, for John Thwaites did not deserve to be put to pain; he was so very good, and he had gone through so much already. But it was not her fault this time, at all events, and besides, there was no real reason for him to vex himself unless he chose. So Emmy did her best to shake off reflection, and tried to rejoice in her good-fortune without reservation.

The day which had thus begun with such excitement was naturally one of a good deal of bustle and turmoil as it went on. Mr. Tovey, who of course had seen the advertisement also, came over in great haste to congratulate his patron, and discuss the possible further development of their plans. Mr. Frisby took the liberty of looking in likewise, to offer his felicitations on the occasion; and after a very jovial lunch, at which a good many glasses of wine were drunk, and a good many new ideas started and discussed, all three gentlemen set off together to inspect the progress of the works which events had suddenly invested with so much additional importance.

Even after their departure the household did not settle down into its normal condition. As was perhaps only natural, Emmy was inclined to be specially restless and excited; and to make her more restless and excited still, she and her mother had hardly been left alone when a visitor was announced—Mr. Randal Egerton. Now Mr. Randal Egerton never having honored them with a call since that which he had paid them shortly after their return from Nidbourne, this was in itself a very flurrying circumstance.

Mrs. Waters rose to greet the new-comer with what struck Emmy as a shade less than the cordiality with which her mother was wont to receive strangers in general, but the young man was as charmingly frank and friendly as ever.

"How do you do, Mrs. Waters? I am delighted to see you looking so well. Miss Waters, how do you do?" and, turning towards Emmy, he looked at her the compliment which he had spoken to her mother.

Both ladies having murmured something in reply, he gracefully let himself drop into a chair which Mrs. Waters had pointed to, and proceeded to remark what an immense time it was since he had had the pleasure of seeing them.

"I have been constantly wondering whether I might do myself the honor of calling, yet never could feel sure how far it might not be regarded as a liberty" (on the occasion of his last visit he had expressly asked and received permission to call again, but he seemed to have forgotten this circumstance). "And then I was always hoping that I might have the pleasure of meeting you in society; but in that, I don't know why, I have been invariably disappointed."

"We go very little into company," said Mrs. Waters in explanation.

"So I believe; but, if you will pardon me for saying so, that is more and more of an enigma. I can not think that either of you would willingly neglect a plain duty, and there are some people who have not the right to make hermits of themselves even if they have the inclination."

He looked at both ladies as he said this, but Emmy thought that his glance rested on her a little longer than on her mother, and could not help feeling as self-conscious as though a special compliment had been paid her. What a finished

gentleman and man of the world this Mr. Egerton was!

"Papa has been so much engaged lately," she faltered, "that really—"

"I can understand that where the demands of society would be so numerous, it might be too great a sacrifice to satisfy them all; but surely, you ought to make some exceptions. The *fête* at the Castle the other day, for instance, when Lord Trevorton came of age—I made sure that I should have the pleasure of meeting you there."

Again Emmy felt very much complimented. It was pleasant to have it taken for granted that they were on the Castle visiting-list, and yet it was a little embarrassing as well. Was it necessary to confess that they had not received an invitation? But her mother solved the uncertainty at once by proclaiming the fact in so many words.

Randal did not seem surprised, as Emmy had expected that he would; and certainly the expression of his surprise, though gratifying in one respect, would have been slightly humiliating in another.

"It is natural that you should not be invited when it is known how studiously you keep yourselves aloof from all society," he answered with a shrug of the shoulders. "People don't like to lay themselves open to a refusal, especially people in that station. But it is none the less your own fault that you were not present, and I really think those who were present have some cause to complain."

He spoke the last words with quite an ill-used air, and Emmy felt hugely gratified. Was it possible the Castle people had really been afraid of a refusal? And yet very likely it was so. She thought of John Thwaites, and wondered what he would say if he were to hear of her mixing in such magnificent company.

"I suppose it was a very gay affair," she remarked timidly, by way of saying something.

"It was altogether a very pleasant day. Really it is a thousand pities you were not there; the gathering of county families would then have been almost complete. Did you see the paragraph about it in the papers this morning?"

"I did not notice it," said Emmy.

"I see they speak of Lady Victoria Fenton as being the observed of all observers. I can't say I was extraordinarily impressed with her myself, but she was the beauty of the evening decidedly—for want of a better."

Here his eye, accidentally as it were, caught for an instant that of Emmy, who felt herself getting very red.

"She is very handsome, no doubt," he went on, withdrawing his eyes again to fix them on the handle of his riding-whip. "I remember her coming-out ball last winter; she made quite a sensation. What charming things those coming-out balls are!"

Emmy's heart swelled as she thought how charming they must indeed be, and how happy must be the heroine of such an occasion. Ah! if only her father and mother would give a ball, perhaps she might make almost as great a sensation as Lady Victoria had done. And then only fancy what John Thwaites would think!

"But I suppose it is vain to ask your opinion of balls or parties of any kind, Miss Waters. You disapprove of them altogether, I am afraid."

"Oh no, indeed!" she protested; "on the contrary, I am sure I should quite delight in them. And indeed papa is always talking of letting me have a ball or something some day, only he has had so much to worry him lately— But I think he surely won't put off much longer now that it is all settled about the railway."

"All settled about the railway?" echoed Randal with a puzzled air.

"Did you not know?" said Emmy, quite astonished. "There is an advertisement in the papers this morning which shows it is all right; the railway is to be begun next year. Papa is so pleased; he is over at Beacon Bay now."

"Indeed! In the papers this morning, you say? Ah! no wonder I didn't know—I have not opened a paper for a week."

Emmy was a little surprised to hear this, remembering what he had said as to the paragraph about the *fête*, but presently she understood that he must have been speaking figuratively, and merely meant that he had not looked at the advertisements that morning.

"Papers are such bores generally, are they not? But I am extremely glad to hear that for once they have proved so interesting. Mrs. Waters, I have to offer you my warmest congratulations. I am afraid you must have thought me very odd for not doing so sooner, but of course having no idea—"

"Oh! of course," said Mrs. Waters. "But I did not think any thing about it, I assure you."

"It is very good of you to say so. I would not knowingly have been so neglectful, for this world. Well, at least now you must allow me to say how heartily I rejoice at the news. Will you please present my compliments to Mr. Waters, and tell him that nobody can congratulate him more sincerely than I do."

Mrs. Waters thanked him, and said she would do as he wished. Emmy muttered something about Mr. Egerton being very kind, and looked at her mother rather reproachfully. But, in spite of Emmy's reproachful look, Mrs. Waters did not say more.

"I hope we shall all have reason to congratulate ourselves," Randal pursued. "As you say, Miss Waters, perhaps now that a matter is settled which must have occupied so much of your father's thoughts, his neighbors may have a chance of seeing him and all of you a little more frequently among them; the boon conferred on them by the new railway will then be doubled."

He accompanied this speech with a gallant bow, which made Emmy feel more than ever self-conscious.

"Oh yes! I am sure papa will be quite different now," she replied, with a shake of her curls. "Indeed I almost think I will try and coax him to let us get up a ball at once—it would be so delightful."

"And I can only say, Miss Waters, that I hope your coaxing may be effectual—at least I should hope so if I thought I might venture to aspire to the privilege of an invitation," he added, with a deferential look towards the lady of the house.

Emmy's pulse gave a leap of exultation. And so here already was one guest for the ball, if only her father would let her have it, and a guest of how much personal and social distinc-

tion! What would John Thwaites think when he saw? If only her father would let her have a ball at all just now!

Randal kept his dark eyes fixed on her for a moment, and then, perhaps judging that the right amount of effect had been produced, rose to take leave. Before finally doing so, however, he inquired, just as he was shaking hands with Mrs. Waters:

"By-the-way, have you heard any thing of when this Mr. Graham is to come back?"

The name was one which, since the conversation that had followed on Randal's last visit, made both mother and daughter feel strangely embarrassed when either heard it mentioned in the presence of the other. For an instant there was a pause which called up on the young man's face a slight but perceptible look of surprise, whereupon Mrs. Waters, making a great effort at self-composure, answered:

"I believe very soon now, at least so I hear from Miss Egerton. I understand he is to return earlier than was expected."

"So it seems; Olivia is quite in good spirits about it. Well, since what you told me last time I was here, I am in good spirits too—it was indeed a very, very great relief to my mind. Good-bye—my best regards and congratulations to Mr. Waters. Miss Waters, I have the pleasure of wishing you good-day. I hope you will be successful in your pleading, but indeed I can not imagine how you could be any thing else."

And then, with a low bow and another expressive look, the brilliant stranger had departed, and the drawing-room at the Laurels faded into its normal state of dreary grandeur.

If Emmy had been unsettled before, she was more unsettled than ever now. The idea of a ball had got fairly into her head, and for that day she could think of nothing else. How charming it would be, and what a lovely dress she would have, and what a competition there would be for the honor of dancing with her! Mr. Egerton would ask her first, of course—only fancy dancing with Mr. Egerton! And John Thwaites would be looking on—how surprised he would be to see her so splendidly dressed, and how he would follow her with his eyes as she moved through the mazes of the dance with her partner! Somebody would tell him, no doubt, that her partner was Mr. Egerton of Clare Court—how astonished he would be!—but she would take it all entirely as an every-day affair, and would go on laughing and talking and fanning herself quite unconcernedly. And later in the evening (for naturally she would have to dance with all the principal gentlemen first) John Thwaites himself would ask for the honor of her hand, and she would consent, of course—she could not do less. And then what nonsense he would talk, and what things he would whisper about the ribbon, and how he would press her hand when it touched his in the course of the dance, and how she would find him looking at her when she raised her eyes, and how—Ah! that dear delightful ball—it would be nicer even than charades.

Her father had no sooner returned that evening than she began her attack.

"Papa, I have a great favor to ask of you."

"Well, child, out with it," said Austin jovially;

and though he was looking rather flushed and heated, Emmy saw that he was in an unwontedly accessible humor.

"Papa dear," she went on more boldly, "now that it has all come right about the railway, will you let us have a party? You know you have promised us something of the sort for an age, so I really think you ought to do it now. And you have never taken us up to London, as you said you would, and of course you can't now till next season; and every body is wondering at our making such hermits of ourselves—Mr. Randal Egerton was here to-day, and upon my word, to hear him speak, one would think we had given great offense—and I am so fond of dancing, and—"

"And—and—what's the use of so many ands, child? A party—yes, as large a party as ever you like to ask, and dancing till six o'clock in the morning, if you can keep awake. And every body shall fill a bumper to the prosperity of the Beacon Bay railway, what do you think of that? A party—why, it's a first-rate idea. Send out the invitations the first thing to-morrow, d'ye hear? And come and kiss me in the mean time."

Emmy responded enthusiastically to the demand.

"Oh! papa, it is so very, very kind of you. If you only knew how I have been longing for it! A ball in one's own house, how delicious!"

"But, my dear," put in Mrs. Waters in some consternation, "I am afraid your ball will be a very small one. We know comparatively so few."

"And that's just why we ought to make a beginning," retorted Emmy. "Why, you may understand by what Mr. Egerton said how we have been offending people. If we ever want to make friends, we must let them see we can give entertainments like our neighbors, and a small party is better than none at all, at any rate. Besides, it won't be so very small, either—there will be the Elkinsees, and the Jollifesses, and the Tomlinsons, and the Walkers, and the Wilsons, and the Smiths—oh! and loads and loads more! And then there will be Miss Egerton—and by-the-way, we must not forget Mr. Egerton while we are about it; he as good as said he expected to be asked, you know."

"Mr. Egerton!" said her mother, looking rather troubled. "But Mr. Egerton belongs to such a very different set from ours—"

"Oh! mamma," said Emmy reproachfully.

"Why, if he is better than all our other friends, that is just the reason for inviting him. And when he as good as said—"

"Invite him, of course," interposed her father peremptorily. "I consider him a very suitable acquaintance to cultivate," and here he waved his hand loftily.

"And then," resumed Emmy when this point had been settled, "there will be the Simpsons, and the Kings, and the Attwoods—"

"And John Thwaites," murmured Mrs. Waters, as Emmy paused to consider.

"John Thwaites!" echoed Emmy carelessly, yet with a slight inflection of surprise, as though the idea were quite new to her. "Oh! well—yes, I suppose so—one couldn't very well leave him out when one is asking every body."

And thus this point was settled also, and the ball took rank among the things that were to be.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## EMMY'S FIRST BALL.

ABOUT a month after this, in the beginning of December, an evening came which had been looked forward to and prepared for at the Laurels as never evening had been looked forward to and prepared for there before. It was the evening appointed for the ball.

The occasion was as grand as even Emmy could have desired. In the interval, short as it was, which had elapsed since the official decision with regard to the Beacon Bay railway had been made known, there had been an appreciable widening of the somewhat narrow circle of acquaintances to which the family had hitherto been restricted, and some important additions had in consequence been made to the originally rather scanty list of invitations. For instance, the heads of one or two considerable county families in the district had made a polite morning call on the new occupants of the Laurels, alleging absence from home as an excuse for not having done so sooner, while one or two other desirable acquaintanceships which had languished after a single exchange of calls had been suddenly galvanized into new life by a note or visit of congratulation. Then Austin had all at once found some of the owners and tenants of property adjoining his newly-acquired estate at Beacon Bay laudably desirous of cultivating neighborly intimacy, and in that and other quarters had managed to pick up sundry very eligible guests not at first counted on.

Thus the reception-rooms at the Laurels—draped and garlanded and illuminated till they looked quite resplendent with light and color—were very satisfactorily filled, satisfactorily as regarded quality no less than quantity. Among the more distinguished members of the company was Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, whose presence would alone have been sufficient to give the occasion an aristocratic prestige in the eyes of Chorcombe party-givers. But in addition to the heir of Clare Court, there was the possessor of the far richer domain of Egerton Park; and familiar as were Olivia's face and figure to the dwellers in the neighborhood, her company at a party was always esteemed a grand acquisition. Besides, this evening there was something about her not altogether familiar—a certain glow and sparkle which hardly any one present had noticed in her before, and which would have made her a prominent object of interest and attraction even in a ball-room where her social importance was unknown. In fact there were two or three who declared afterwards that they had had no notion Miss Egerton was so handsome, and that really and truly they considered her to have been quite the belle of the evening. So much can joy do for some faces, and just now Olivia was half delirious with joy and excitement. She had seen a telegram that day announcing the safe arrival at Marseilles of the ship which, as she knew, was bringing her lover home.

But the heroine of the ball and the belle of the evening, in her own and the general opinion, was decidedly Emmy. Hers was a beauty at all times more showy than that of Olivia (as has been seen, it was only under favorable circumstances that Olivia could lay claim to beauty at all); and this evening, set off by the most elegant toilet of flow-

ers and lace and blonde that milliner's imagination could devise, she had become, in her own estimation at least, perfectly dazzling. As she took a final survey of her little figure in her glass before descending to the scene of action, she was so much struck with her appearance that she felt quite curious to see what would be the effect on John Thwaites.

The effect on John Thwaites was evidently quite as strong as she could have desired. He entered the ball-room just as the band was about to strike up for the first quadrille, and from the astonished, half-dismayed look which he cast round, she understood at once that he had not been prepared to find things on nearly so grand a scale. Presently his eyes fastened on herself, and she saw that he was more and more surprised.

He noticed that she was looking, and recovered himself sufficiently to go forward and stammer a "How do you do, Miss Waters?"

"How do you do, Mr. Thwaites?" said Emmy unconcernedly, and then, knowing that he was inspecting her, she examined the fastening of her glove very minutely while she added: "I suppose it is a very fine evening out of doors."

"Oh yes! very—that is, it is raining just now, but of course—" He paused and looked round the room again; then, as though seeking an escape from his confusion, asked timidly: "You have all been quite well, I hope, since last I saw you?"

"Since last you saw us?" said Emmy with a slightly perplexed air, for she did not choose to look as if she had nothing to do but count the days since last she saw John Thwaites.

"At Miss Egerton's," he said eagerly. "That evening of the charade, you know."

"Ah! to be sure, at Miss Egerton's. I declare I had almost forgotten," said Emmy, fiddling with her glove-button again as an excuse for not looking up.

"Miss Waters," said a sonorous voice close to her ear—not John Thwaites's this time—"you remember you are engaged to me for the first set, I hope? They are just going to begin."

She raised her head, and found Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court standing by her side offering his arm. She was quite startled; for though she had been talking to him only a few minutes before, she had just then forgotten that there was any such person in the world, and slipped her arm within his in some trepidation. As she did so, she let her eyes rest for an instant on John Thwaites's face. There she saw a look of great pain—of such pain that she could not but feel a momentary pang of pain also. Was it possible that he believed she had really forgotten the evening of the charade?

But she had something else to think of than the look of pain on John Thwaites's face, and the twinge of regret or remorse which it had caused her quickly died away. Her partner led her to her place at the top of the room, the music struck up, he bowed and she courtesied, the first figure was begun, and all compunction was forgotten in a rush of excitement. There she was, actually dancing the first quadrille of her first ball, with Mr. Randal Egerton for her partner (what a polite and deferential partner he made!), and half Chorcombe standing by to see, John Thwaites among the number. For though

she had ceased to feel concern for John Thwaites's pain, she had by no means ceased to take interest in John Thwaites himself, and remembered his presence in the midst of all that there was to distract her.

There certainly was a great deal to distract her. No sooner was the first figure over than the business of attending to her steps was succeeded by the business of attending to her partner's conversation.

"We all owe you a deep debt of gratitude for this evening, Miss Waters," he began, after looking at her for a few moments so attentively that she dropped her eyelids in some confusion. "I was quite certain that you could not plead any cause in vain."

"Indeed!" said Emmy rather awkwardly, for she felt it desperately difficult to say any thing. But she thought of John Thwaites, and determined to do her very best to keep up the conversation with spirit. "I was not at all certain of it myself," she added, pulling open her fan, and then shutting it again.

"Were you not? I should have thought you would have known better the extent of your own influence."

"Oh! well, I have a little influence with papa and mamma, of course."

"Only with them, Miss Waters? And are you really of opinion that the circle of your empire is so limited?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Emmy, fanning herself. "But I am very glad I have succeeded, at any rate. I am so extremely fond of dancing."

"Extremely fond of dancing!" he echoed with a half-sigh. "Ah, yes! I was sure of it."

"Dear me, how could you be sure of any thing of the sort?" she demanded with a little pout, for she was beginning to gain courage. "Because you think me so very frivolous, I suppose."

"Because it is quite impossible that you should fail to enjoy what you make others enjoy so much," he responded in a low voice, and he accompanied the words with a look so strangely expressive that she felt herself ready to drop with flurry and agitation. Still even at this crisis she did not forget John Thwaites, and, yielding to an irresistible impulse, glanced towards the part of the room where she had seen him last. There he was, exactly in the same place, standing against the wall in an obscure corner, and, as she thought, with his eyes turned in her direction. But he withdrew them the instant they met hers, and fixed them steadfastly, and, as it seemed to her, sullenly on the floor. She looked at him two or three times again within the next few minutes, but there was no change in his attitude, not even when at the end of the quadrille she and her partner passed him quite close in the final gallop. Did he take upon himself, then, to be angry with her? She felt quite piqued, and determined that she would ask him what had been the matter the very first time they danced together that evening.

But the expected opportunity was very long in coming. She was not much surprised that he did not ask her to dance next time, or next, or even the next again, there being some three or four young men in the room whom he might naturally consider to have a prior claim by supe-

rior social standing. But when she had danced with all these, and still John Thwaites did not come forward, she began to get very much surprised, and a little indignant as well. Did he not know it was his bounden duty to dance with the young lady of the house?—not that she needed partners indeed, she had plenty of them and to spare, but that was no reason why she should be slighted by John Thwaites. It was true that she had not seen him dancing with any body else, but if he was going to hang about in dark corners all evening behaving like a perfect bear, what business had he to come at all?

She went on dancing furiously with a long succession of partners, but John Thwaites was not one of them. At last she found herself standing up for a second quadrille with Mr. Egerton, who declared that his turn had certainly come round again; but though others were so anxious for the honor of her hand, John Thwaites had still remained in the background. Was it possible that he was too shy to claim a privilege for which so many were contending? But no, whatever he was, he evidently could not be shy, for there he was actually coming forward with Miss Egerton on his arm to stand opposite her and her partner. Shy indeed—no, he certainly was not shy, or he never could have had the audacity to ask Miss Egerton of Egerton Park.

The deduction seemed reasonable enough, but, as it happened, the premises were mistaken. It was not John Thwaites who had asked Miss Egerton, but Miss Egerton who had asked John Thwaites. He had not intended to dance that evening, but Miss Egerton had invited him to stand up with her, and how could he refuse?

"Really, Mr. Thwaites, you make such a capital partner that I can't imagine how it is you have not been dancing oftener," said Olivia at the end of the first figure. "And I have not noticed you dancing at all."

"I have not been dancing at all," said John, reddening—"not till just now, at least."

"And you would not have been dancing just now if I had not had the impudence to ask you. Pray what do you mean by being so remiss? Don't you know it is a gentleman's business to dance at a dancing-party without waiting to be compelled?"

"There are plenty of gentlemen in the room much better partners than I can be," he answered somewhat gloomily, and as he spoke he gave an involuntary glance towards the couple opposite.

"That is a matter of opinion, and at all events you ought to give the ladies a chance of choosing."

"I am afraid the ladies would not thank me for the chance, some of them," said John, still gloomily, and again he gave a glance across the room. "A fellow doesn't care to ask only to be refused."

"But it is your duty to ask, whether you are to be refused or not—your duty as regards some ladies, at any rate. The young lady of the house, for instance—"

"Oh! she has been dancing all evening," he interrupted hastily; "she wouldn't care to—"

"That makes no difference. In common politeness you ought to ask her, and you have no business to be rude yourself just because you are afraid of rudeness from somebody else."

He did not answer; but next time his hand touched that of Emmy in the course of the figure he ventured to look into her face with something of an inquiring expression.

"What a delightful quadrille we are having!" she said enthusiastically as she passed him.

"Delightful!" he acquiesced, with a sudden leap at his heart, and forthwith he resolved to engage her for the next dance as soon as ever he should be at liberty. But then he remembered with a jealous pang who was her partner in the quadrille which she found so delightful, and became once more undecided.

"Now recollect, Mr. Thwaites," said Olivia, as he led her to a seat when the dance was over, "I have been giving you a lecture, and I expect to see you profit by it."

"You really think I ought?" said John doubtfully, with yet another glance at Emmy, for, poor fellow, he knew quite well what Olivia was aiming at.

"Of course I think you ought. And I can tell her she has not had a partner to be compared with you all the evening."

A minute or two after this, Emmy, leisurely surveying the company from the chair which Mr. Egerton had with his own hands placed for her, saw John Thwaites crossing the room straight in her direction. And yet, though she knew that he was at last coming to ask her to dance with him, and knew also that she intended to dance with him when asked, she had no sooner caught sight of him than she turned round to say something or other to a lady sitting near her. She was not going to sit like a statue waiting for John Thwaites, not she; if he wanted her, let him come up and stand till she was ready to speak to him. So she went on talking to her friend, making sure that John Thwaites was close at hand watching his opportunity. But when, having said all that she could find to say, she looked round again, he was not there, and presently she saw him quite in another part of the room. Her strategy on this occasion had not been successful.

She thought that he would soon make another attempt to reach her, but she was wrong again. She danced a great many times, and with a great many different partners, still John Thwaites never came near her. At last the hour of supper arrived (and somehow, remembering that pleasant supper at Miss Egerton's, she had always pictured herself being taken into the supper-room under John Thwaites's escort), but even then he continued to keep aloof. She was not deserted by every body, however, for Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court had come forward in the politest, most respectful manner imaginable, and petitioned for the honor of taking her in to supper in accents that were almost imploring. Of course she had assented, only too glad to let John Thwaites see that she had found somebody willing to undertake the task of serving her. And how exquisitely was the task performed by this new attendant of hers—with what courteous solicitude was her every want forestalled—with what watchful gallantry her every movement observed! Then he was talking to her almost the whole of the time, pouring into her ear a succession of low-voiced compliments that kept her in a state of perpetual blush and simper. It was certain that John Thwaites, though he was too

far off to hear what was said, could not fail to see that she was getting on very well without him.

Nor did Mr. Egerton's ministrations cease even when he had escorted her back to the ball-room. They were among the first to re-enter it, and Emmy had expected that, following the example of some other gentlemen whom they had met returning to the supper-table after disposing of their fair charges, he would leave her while he went back to finish his wine. But he evidently had no idea of giving her up so easily, and, having established her in a secluded corner where an open door made a sort of screen to shield them partially from public view, he brought up another chair and installed himself by her side.

"It is such a luxury to get an opportunity for a little quiet interchange of ideas after all this bustle. I hope you do not grudge it to me, Miss Waters."

"Oh no! of course," faltered Emmy. "But you must not stay here on my account, you know. I am afraid you have been neglecting yourself dreadfully."

"Neglecting myself! Oh dear no! I am much too selfish for that. On the contrary, I have been indulging myself—pampering myself, I may almost say—and here I am indulging myself still."

"Indeed," said Emmy, casting down her eyes. "I hardly understand what you mean by that."

"Do you not? You don't understand that this to me is just the most enjoyable part of the whole evening?"

"Well, it is rather difficult to understand, certainly."

"It is not at all enjoyable to you, then?" he asked reproachfully.

"Oh! I didn't quite say that," protested Emmy, and began fanning herself in a vain endeavor to conceal her self-consciousness.

"Let me do that for you," said Randal pleadingly, and gently possessed himself of the fan.

"There, do you like it? Tell me if I am doing it properly."

"Oh! you are doing it beautifully; it is very pleasant indeed. But you are giving yourself so much trouble."

"Trouble—it is the greatest pleasure in the world. I only wish I could look forward to enjoying it for the next three hours to come."

Emmy did not answer for an instant. Two or three gentlemen were just then entering by the door near which she was sitting, and, having recognized in one of them John Thwaites (she knew it was he, though she did not see his face), she could not immediately call back her attention. But she managed to recover herself in time.

"For three hours!" she laughed. "Oh! what a very unprofitable occupation for three hours!"

And then she let her eyes wander once more towards John Thwaites. Actually he had taken up his station just in front of her—he was talking to another gentleman, and so had not noticed who was behind him.

"That depends on how you define unprofitable, Miss Waters. For my part I don't see how an occupation can be unprofitable that makes one intensely happy."

"Oh dear! what shocking nonsense!"

"Yes, shocking nonsense to you, no doubt. You could not sit here and be fanned for three

hours without getting tired of it, I suppose—not, at least, if I was the fanner?"

"Oh! Mr. Egerton!" murmured Emmy, greatly confused, all the more so that she thought she saw John Thwaites turn his head slightly as though to listen.

"Could you?" persisted Randal. "Do tell me if you think you could."

Emmy laughed and blushed, and for the first moment knew not what to say. In the next, however, she detected a side-glance which John Thwaites was directing towards her, and understood that he was really listening. Well, at all events she was not going to be dictated to by him.

"Oh yes! of course I could. Indeed I think I should like it very much—it is so cool and pleasant."

"Thank you, Miss Waters. Ah! if you knew how it increases my enjoyment to be able to believe that you partially share it!"

He looked at her with more eloquence of expression than there had been in his eyes yet, and there is no knowing what he might have gone on to add if at that juncture Olivia, who had been observing the pair from the other side of the room, had not come forward, saying very sweetly:

"Oh! Randal, I think I have left my handkerchief in the supper-room. Might I trouble you to go and look for it?"

Randal frowned slightly, but declared that he would go with the greatest pleasure. Olivia thanked him and glided back to her seat, looking rather meaningly at John Thwaites as she did so. Perhaps she expected him to go and speak to Emmy, now that the coast was clear.

He did go and speak to Emmy presently, but it was with a voice so cold and measured that it did not seem to be his at all.

"Good-bye, Miss Waters; I am going away now."

"Going away!" said Emmy almost with a start. "Why, the evening has hardly begun."

"Good-bye, Miss Waters," said John obstinately.

He looked so determined that Emmy felt quite overawed. He was evidently very much offended, and she did not want him to be offended irrevocably.

"Had you not better stay for a little more dancing? There is the band just going to begin."

"I don't want any more dancing, thank you. No, I can not stay any longer."

"What! not just for the first quadrille after supper?" said Emmy, looking up with something of a beseeching expression in her face, for she really wanted him very much to stay.

The beseeching expression was not without its effect. He stood apparently wavering for a second or two, then said abruptly:

"If you will dance it with me, Miss Emmy."

"I! Oh yes! certainly," said Emmy, so much taken aback that she had not even presence of mind to study the little ivory tablets which she kept for noting down her engagements, and which she had made a great parade of consulting all through the evening.

The music struck up, and in great agitation he offered his arm, which in almost equal agitation she accepted, and presently they found themselves standing together at the side of the room,

waiting for the first and second couples to lead off.

There was silence between them for a little while, neither having any clear idea of what it would be desirable to say. At last, as John was casting about for something with which to begin the conversation, his eye fell on Randal Egerton, who had just re-entered the room and was looking eagerly towards the place where he had left Emmy. As John saw, a very bitter look crossed his face, and, turning to Emmy, he spoke without further hesitation.

"I am afraid I have been very presumptuous in asking you to dance with me when there are so many in the room whom no doubt you would prefer. I can't think what made me do it, really."

Emmy hardly knew how to answer. The words themselves implied only an excess of humility, but there was something in the manner with which they were spoken that suggested that humility had nothing to do with them. Could it be that he meant to find fault with her for having danced with any body but himself? If so, what unparalleled audacity!

"There are certainly some gentlemen here who dance particularly well," she answered, fencing with the subject. "And it is a great luxury to dance with a good partner."

"Of course it must be," said John, and this time there was no mistaking the undertone of irony in his voice. "And that makes me the more sorry for having deprived you of it."

Emmy could not return an immediate answer, being just then summoned to execute her share in the figure. But all the time that she was dancing she was meditating on John Thwaites's intolerable pretensions. Did he think she was going to let herself be called to account by him? But she would say something that would punish him nicely.

"Have you noticed what a beautiful dancer Mr. Egerton is?" she asked as soon as she rejoined him.

"Oh yes! I have noticed every thing. And I think it is almost a pity you do not dance with him every time, when you enjoy it so much."

"Oh! but you know it would not be the thing to dance with the same gentleman quite every time, however much one might like it," said Emmy demurely, for she was determined to let him see that she was not to be put down so easily as he thought.

"It would be no worse to dance with the same gentleman every time than to let him fan you for three hours," retorted John with a kind of desperate courage, while all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his face. "And I heard you say you would not object to that."

"You heard me say so, Mr. Thwaites?" repeated Emmy, trifling rather nervously with her handkerchief, for the boldness of the accusation really did put her on a little.

"Yes, I heard it. And if I had not heard it with my own ears I could not have believed that you would have said such things—to that mustached fortune-hunting dandy, and let him say such things to you—no, that I could not."

"I don't see what right you have to speak to me in that way," said Emmy, looking a little subdued, however.

"What right! What! when you gave me that ribbon—"



The conversation was interrupted again here, and really Emmy was so much upset that she was quite glad to have a little time to collect her thoughts. What should she do?—let him have his own way, and say no more about it? He was in such a passion that perhaps it would be the best plan. And yet no, it would never do to let him think that he had conquered.

"What ribbon?" she asked innocently, when they were standing together again.

"What ribbon? do you pretend to forget that ribbon which you gave me the night of the cha—"

"Which I gave you, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Well, which you let me take, then; it comes to much the same."

"I don't see that at all. If you chose to pick up something that belonged to me—"

"I ought to have given it back again, ought I not? Well, I will give it back again now if you like; it is not too late."

"Oh! of course not. The dress is not nearly worn out yet, and it really looks quite stupid with one of the bows missing."

"The bow shall not be missing long. I will send it back to-morrow. You will find it none the worse for having been in my possession; I have been storing it up, like a fool, in the desk where I keep all my greatest treasures. But I shall not be a fool any more—I will send it back to-morrow."

Emmy felt something in her throat which prevented her from answering at once. So he was actually going to send back the ribbon, was he?—that ribbon which he had made such promises and professions on receiving. Then every thing was to be at an end between them? Well, what must be, must be—she could not ask him to keep the ribbon, of course. But she was so much agitated that she scarcely knew how she got through the next figure.

When it was over she waited for a minute to see if he had any thing more to add. But he stood by her side in moody silence, and with rather an unsteady voice she said:

"If you have any thing of mine to send back, I hope you will not do it so as to make papa or mamma or any body else think it was I who gave it you. I would almost rather you kept it than that I should be disgraced like that."

"Yes, you would think it a dreadful disgrace to have given me any thing, I suppose."

Emmy's heart throbbled with pain and anger. How cruel he was, and vindictive and unforgiving—and how he would like to trample her under foot! But she would not let him.

"A dreadful disgrace—indeed I should," she answered, half clenching her little hand as she spoke. "I should consider I had let myself down to the very dust. But I did not give it to you; you know very well I did not."

"It is quite enough that you wish nobody to think so," he said, looking very pale. "You need not be afraid; I shall find some way of sending it back without disgracing you."

So he was quite determined to send it back, then! She did not say more; she would have despised herself if she had added another syllable. He did not speak either, and, so far as these two were concerned, the dance was finished in profound silence. Emmy thought it possible that when it was over he might make

some attempt to renew the conversation, but he did not. Without a word he led her back to the place where he had found her, and, bowing silently, turned on his heel. In another minute he had passed out of the room.

Nobody could have watched Emmy for the rest of that evening and suspected for an instant that there was the slightest cloud on the completeness of her enjoyment. She danced an immense deal, and with an appearance of almost delirious delight, and laughed and chattered away to her various partners with more vivacity than as yet she had shown at all. Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, who, dancing with her oftener than any body else, had the best opportunities of judging, particularly remarked her apparent elation, and, ascribing it to his own attentions, felt quite flattered.

But when every body had gone away and the house was once more restored to quiet, Emmy did not feel quite so happy or self-complacent as might have been expected from her previous exhilaration. On the contrary, there weighed upon her a sense of profound dissatisfaction with herself and others, against which she had been vainly doing battle, and which now came back to take almost entire possession of her. And so John Thwaites had chosen to quarrel with her! She was not to blame of course; still perhaps there were some things which she had better not have said—about the ribbon, for instance, and the dress looking stupid without it. But surely he would not really send it back—surely he would change his mind when the time came. Perhaps indeed he had never seriously intended to send it back at all; it was quite possible that he might now and then say things he did not altogether mean, just as she herself did occasionally. Oh yes! he had put it in the desk where he kept all his greatest treasures, and certainly he could never bring himself to take it out again—not, at least, if he had ever cared about her as he said he did.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### VICE JOHN THWAITES RETIRED.

THE next morning, as the family at the Lancers—all feeling rather tired and fagged with last night's dissipation—were sitting at an unusually late breakfast, a servant entered to hand Emmy a small paper bag with something pinned inside. Emmy quite started as it was laid before her—could it be—But surely all that nonsense was forgotten by this time.

"A boy has just left this for you, miss. He says somebody picked it up a few days ago where you had been, and thinks it must belong to you."

"What can it be?" said Emmy faintly, then, seeing that her father and mother were both looking on in some curiosity, she unpinned the bag and shook out the contents.

A knot of violet ribbon fell on her plate. She had half expected as much, and yet was so startled at the sight that she had not breath to say a word.

"Why, that is some mistake, I think," said Mrs. Waters. "It is not yours, Emmy, is it?"

"I—I believe it is, mamma," answered Emmy rather huskily. "My black grenadine, you know; I have been missing one of the bows for some time. Oh yes! it is all right, Thomas."

"They must be very conscientious people who trouble themselves about such a trifle," remarked Mrs. Waters, laughing. "Give the boy sixpence for himself; I suppose that is what he really came for."

"He went away directly, ma'am. I had not even time to ask who sent him."

"Indeed! Oh! very well, that will do. Really it is exceedingly odd," went on Mrs. Waters as the man withdrew. "The idea of any body thinking it worth while to send a thing like that!"

"I am very glad they did think it worth while, that's all," said Emmy energetically. "The dress has been quite spoilt without it, and I am so pleased to have it back again—so pleased."

She thrust the ribbon into her pocket as she spoke, vowing to herself that she was not only pleased, but delighted. And yet, her delight notwithstanding, she had no sooner got it out of sight than she crushed it up in her palm as though she hated it.

The subject dropped, out of the conversation at least, for it was as prominent as ever in Emmy's mind. During the whole of breakfast-time she hardly knew what was said to her, hardly knew what she said herself, was scarcely, indeed, conscious of any thing save of that ribbon lying crumpled up in her pocket—that despised, rejected, ignominiously-cast-away ribbon.

At last, to her great relief, the meal was over, and she was set free from the restraints of observation. Her father, according to his wont, went out to look after the works at Beacon Bay; and her mother, tired with the exertions of the previous evening, withdrew to her own room to rest, so that Emmy was left with the whole morning before her to give way as she chose to sweet or bitter reflection.

She was no sooner alone than she hurried to her room and locked herself in, then, taking the crushed ribbon from her pocket, sat down with a pair of scissors, and snipped it first in one direction and next in another, till its identity as a ribbon was quite destroyed. Then she pushed the fragments from her, and sat for a long time looking at them through a hot mist that gradually grew thicker and thicker before her eyes. So he had flung back her gift in her face—that gift which she had plotted so ingeniously to let him have—that gift which he had sworn, on receiving it, to keep and cherish while life was left to him! Ah! what a pleasant evening that had seemed, but how hateful it had really been! what an evening of folly and degradation! To think how far she had abused herself to please him—actually to the point of letting him carry away something that had been hers! and with what result!—to be insulted by having her token returned with scorn. Ah! there were others who would not have used her so—there were others, she was quite sure, to whom the merest trifle that had belonged to her would be precious—others a great deal better born and better gentlemen altogether than John Thwaites. But he had chosen not to cumber himself with the smallest relic of her, he had chosen to cast it forth as something worthless and odious, and she was glad of it—very glad. For now every thing between them was at an end—definitively and forever at an end—with no more possibility of

being renewed than there was possibility of piecing together that poor alighted ribbon into what it had been when he had taken it from her dress the evening of the charade.

All at once she discovered that scalding tears were running down her cheeks, and filling her eyes so that she could not see for them. Actually she was crying! She sprang from her chair in a paroxysm of shame and anger, tossed the hated shreds far away from her, and rushed to bathe her face in a basin of cold water. Then, because her eyes still felt hot and inflamed, she went to her window, and, flinging it open, stood with her face turned towards the fresh keen breeze of the December day. She was determined, in one way or other, to efface every outward sign of her weakness.

The prospect without was very pleasant. The day was bright and sunny, and the view over fields and woods and villages and distant hills was almost as smiling as in summer, with the additional advantage of a wintry clearness and distinctness of outline. Every thing looked so cheerful and inviting, and the sharp crisp air blew so refreshingly on her cheek, that Emmy began to think that what would do her more good than any thing else would be a nice long smart walk. She had not been much in the habit of going out by herself since the change in her fortunes, but for that very reason the idea was now all the more tempting. Yes, she would go and have a good walk, unhampered by carriage or footman, or other such encumbrance; nothing like fresh air and exercise when one was a little over-fatigued.

She speedily got herself arrayed in her walking costume, and, having consulted her mirror to make sure that her eyes were not perceptibly red, sallied out of the room and the house. She felt wonderfully invigorated as soon as she was in the open air, and, turning into an unfrequented lane near the house, went posting along the rough road with as much briskness and energy in her little feet as though each separate stone or twig that they trampled on had been a John Thwaites.

In this determined mood she got over a great deal of ground almost without knowing it, and with hardly any sense of fatigue. At last, on emerging from a network of solitary lanes and field-paths into a part of the high-road about two miles from her home, she came to a halt, and stood for a minute to rest and look about her before turning to retrace her steps. She found herself surprisingly strengthened both in body and mind, and quite enjoyed the beautiful view which at that point was obtainable of Chorcombe and the surrounding neighborhood.

But the walk, though it had done her good in helping her to shake off importunate reflections, had not entirely cured her. She had scarcely begun to admire the view when she caught herself contemplating with special attention an unsightly tall chimney a little way out of the village, which had nothing in the world about it to make it interesting save that it belonged to the establishment where John Thwaites was head clerk. And even when she thus caught herself, she continued to contemplate it still, not of course from any feeling of tenderness or sentimentality, but simply because she could not take her eyes off it.

How abominably he had used her, how rudely,

how ungratefully! But it was all over now—over now and evermore, and a good thing too. The loss was not hers, at all events; she was not troubling her head about him, goodness knew, but very likely he, sitting yonder in his counting-house—

She started, and looked round. She was standing within a few feet of a bend in the road, and had caught a side-glimpse through the leafless branches of the hedge of somebody coming round the corner in her direction. And such is the power which the association of ideas may have over the imagination that for a moment she expected to see— But no, now that she looked, she saw that it was somebody on horseback, and she grew calm again at once. What could have put so ridiculous an idea into her head?

But hardly had she recovered her composure when it was once more upset. The horseman emerged from behind the hedge so that his whole figure became visible, and Emmy, unconcernedly contemplating him as he rode towards her, suddenly recognized—Mr. Randal Egerton!

She stood rooted to the spot, quite dumbfounded by surprise, and had not even presence of mind enough to look another way. Yes, it was really he, her pleasant partner and devoted servitor of the past night—he to whom indeed she had owed all the pleasure of the evening. How well he looked on horseback—the very image of a gallant cavalier and high-born gentleman, as in truth he was. Ah! what a thing it was to be a real gentleman! not like some—

"Miss Waters!" he exclaimed, reining up abruptly, and looking almost as much surprised as she had been herself.

She smiled faintly, unable to devise any other mode of greeting. She was thinking of what John Thwaites would say if he could see her standing to receive the homage of this brilliant equestrian.

He sprang lightly down from his steed, and, holding his bridle with one hand, advanced towards her extending the other.

"I hardly could believe it was you at first, Miss Waters, though indeed I might have known that no one else— But who would have thought of seeing you here, so far from home, and after parting from you so late this morning? I was afraid you would have been so much tired—I was just riding over to inquire."

"You are very kind," murmured Emmy, and her heart gave a little bound at this proof of tender interest. There was one person in the world who cared for her, then! "You are very kind. Yes, I was a little tired, and that was the reason I came out; I thought the fresh air would do me good."

"I need hardly ask if it has had the desired effect."

"Oh yes! I am quite well again now," she answered, looking down shyly.

"And Mr. and Mrs. Waters—they are well too, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you—at least papa is quite well, and has gone over to Beacon Bay, but mamma has got a headache rather."

"Do you think I should be intruding very much if I were to call this morning to pay her my respects?"

"Oh! I am sure she will be very happy to see you."

"Then you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you?"

She blushed, and muttered something she knew not what. Randal turned and gave his bridle to his servant, who had just then ridden up, and who forthwith went forward with the two horses, observing as discreet a distance from his master and the young lady as he had done on a former occasion when his services were put into similar requisition. Emmy, who of course did not know any thing about that former occasion (but indeed perhaps it would have been all the same if she had), felt a thrill of mingled nervousness and exultation. That Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court should actually send away his horse for the pleasure of going home with her on foot—ah! if John Thwaites could but see!

"The road is very rough," he remarked when they had gone a few paces in silence. "You had better take my arm."

She hesitated a little, then very timidly accepted the proffered aid. The road was really very rough indeed, though she had never particularly noticed it before. As she put her arm within his, and recognized the slight pressure—slight, but yet very palpable—with which it was welcomed there, she trembled and felt that at last she had found her destiny. Yes, there could be no longer any doubt, and a very brilliant destiny it was. To be transplanted at once into the highest circles in the county, to be presented at Court, to preside at fashionable gatherings where such people as clerks would never dare to set foot, to be adored and idolized by one whom birth and breeding alike qualified to appreciate her—what better could she wish for?

"What a charming evening we had last night!" he began when he had thus taken possession of her.

"I am very glad you liked it, Mr. Egerton."

"Liked it! I never enjoyed any thing so much in my life—except this morning, and I am enjoying this morning more still. You see I am of a selfish disposition, and last night there were too many to share my happiness to admit of its being quite perfect!"

"Oh!" lisped Emmy deprecatingly.

She was so nervous that it was all she could utter. What was he going to say next? The crisis was certainly close at hand.

For a little time, however, he did not say any thing, and she could not refrain from glancing furtively upward just to see what he was about. Perhaps he was considering how he should best go on, for his eyes were resting with rather a thoughtful and perplexed expression, not on her, but on a certain dark stretch of woodland a little way from Chorcombe.

"How well Egerton Park looks from here!" said Emmy, following the direction of his eyes. She was almost glad to find something that should obtain her breathing-time, were it only for a moment, and she did not think it could be for much longer.

"Very well indeed." He paused, and again she thought the crisis was coming. But again it was put off a little longer, for after a brief consideration he went on to observe:

"Poor Olivia! it is quite delightful to see what spirits she is in. Mr. Graham is expected back in the course of a day or two, I believe."

"I believe he is."

"If only I could be certain he is every thing that she seems to think! What is your opinion, Miss Waters? is he a man really calculated to make her happy?"

"I dare say he may be," said Emmy, wincing a good deal at the question. "That is—oh yes! she will be very happy, I have no doubt."

"You have no reason for thinking otherwise?" he asked, turning his dark eyes earnestly upon her.

"No reason!" she faltered, for she felt she was committing a kind of treason in deceiving him when he asked her with such a look as that. "Oh dear no! no reason, of course."

"Miss Waters," and the earnestness of his look became blended with a shade of tender reproach, "you are not dealing fairly with me. You know something against that man, and you are keeping it back."

"Something against him!" stammered Emmy.

"Yes, I am sure of it. Oh! Miss Waters, I implore you to be frank with me—if not for the sake of my cousin's happiness, for the sake of the honor of my family—of my own honor, that is. What! you know something on which my honor depends, and you will not tell me?"

"What should I know?" said Emmy feebly. "You can not expect me to know more of him than mamma, and she has told you that he was quite respectable."

"And for that far be it from me to blame her. Such questions as I put to your mother that day—impertinent questions, if you will—she had a perfect right to answer as she pleased; my honor and the honor of my family are nothing to her—not yet, at least. But from *you*—ah! from *you*—"

He pressed her arm again, and gazed into her face with such profound tenderness that Emmy could not but feel that already they were as one. Ah! if John Thwaites could only know!

"If *you* tell me there is nothing against him, I will be content," he said, gazing at her still.

She could not have told him so for the world; she would have despised herself for such an abuse of his chivalrous confidence. And yet if she did not tell him so, was not all concealment virtually at an end? What should she do? Ah! what but throw herself at once on his generosity and his love?

"He did something wrong once, when he was quite a young man. But that was a great, great many years ago."

"Something wrong—and what was it?" demanded Randal.

He spoke so eagerly that she was quite frightened to think what she had done.

"Ah! you will never tell any body, will you?" he cried in terror. "It was so many years ago, and he is so sorry for it now—and indeed I am sure he will make Miss Egerton very happy. He is so fond of her, and he is very, very good, I do assure you he is—and poor mamma— Oh! promise, promise you will never tell!"

And as she thought of her mother, and the solemn pledge of secrecy exacted from her, she was almost ready to fall to the ground. But in the same moment she was conscious of an arm gently creeping about her waist—a strong manly arm with a wonderful power of support in it.

"Can you not trust me?" he said in his most expressively vibrating tones.

She felt astonishingly comforted and reassured, and quite clung to him as she answered:

"Oh yes! I am sure I can, you never could be so cruel. It would do no good to tell, you know—only make every body miserable. And poor dear mamma—it would break her heart. Ah! for dear mamma's sake, you won't tell, will you?"

His only reply was to draw her closer to him yet, and she felt that the reply was sufficient.

"But what makes your mother take so much interest in him?" he demanded caressingly.

She was quite startled to find how far she had betrayed herself, and hesitated a while before answering. But how could she keep any thing back from him now? Indeed, was not all that she might say to him only a kind of self-communing?

"Can you not guess?" she said, hanging her head. "Did you never think that perhaps Graham was not his real name?"

A ray of light flickered across Randal's mind—a vague recollection of having heard something of some disgrace connected with a brother of Mrs. Waters.

"Your mother's brother?" he whispered in a voice quite trembling with the excitement of the discovery.

"Ah! but don't tell any body, for Heaven's sake!" she cried beseechingly. "Poor mamma, she made me promise so—"

"What was it exactly that he did—forged or embezzled—something of the kind, I know. What was it?"

"He wrote Uncle Gilbert's name on something or other—I hardly understand what it was," murmured Emmy, writhing under the inquisition, yet entirely unable to resist it. "But it was for a very small sum, only a hundred pounds, I think, and that is so long ago now, and of course Uncle Gilbert was not exactly like a stranger—"

"What is his real name? Not Graham, then?"

"Maxwell—Harold Maxwell—did you not know? Oh! I am afraid it is very wicked of me to tell you, but I would not have told any body else for the world."

She looked at him imploringly, but he did not answer, apparently wholly absorbed in meditation on what he had just heard. So much absorbed was he that he seemed to forget the need she had for support, and, gradually loosening the clasp of his arm round her waist, withdrew it presently altogether.

"You will not betray me!" she exclaimed, seized with sudden anxiety. "Oh! if you do, if you do, what will become of me? Mamma will die, and I shall go mad. Ah! you know you said I might trust you, you know—"

The violence of her emotion roused him at last, and, looking round with the air of one reminded of something that has been forgotten, he asked in a voice of gentle reproof:

"How can you doubt me?"

The words might be in themselves rather conventional and commonplace, but, coming from his lips, they were enough for Emmy. Ah! indeed how could she doubt him? how for an instant suspect that he to whom she was henceforth to be all in all, would take such cruel, such treacherous advantage of her first confidence?

"It is very foolish of me," she said apologetically. "For of course I know that telling you is not like telling any body else—of course I know that you—"

She stopped, almost dismayed to find what an opportunity she was giving him for declaring all his feelings towards her. The declaration would come, of course—had indeed as good as come already—but she could not bear to have it thought that she was inviting it, and kept silence in half-terrified expectation of the use which he would make of her admission. But he said nothing, and she gradually recovered from her apprehension.

They walked on some little time without saying any thing, until at last they came in sight of the servant waiting with the horses at a corner of the road within a stone's throw of the gate of the Laurels. Then Randal spoke—ah! how the sound of his voice made Emmy tremble as she thought of what he might be about to say!

"How provokingly short the days are now! Actually it will be as much as I can do to get home by daylight."

If Emmy had calculated, she might have been rather surprised at this assertion, for it was still more than an hour from sunset, and Clare Court was scarcely ten miles distant. But then Randal had a little commission to execute on the way, of which Emmy knew nothing.

"Mr. Waters is out, you say?" he resumed after rather an awkward pause, for Emmy had been so much taken by surprise that she had made no remark. "And I do not like to disturb Mrs. Waters when she is so tired. Altogether I think I will not intrude just now."

Emmy could answer nothing. What! was he going to leave her—leave her without—

"It is better I should put off a little for the chance of seeing Mr. Waters," he said, perhaps noticing her blank look. "And you may be sure I will not put off long."

He accompanied the assurance with one of those glances of which she had already caught so many—this one, as she thought, more full of meaning than any that had gone before. Her heart beat lightly, as though a load had been lifted off it. Ah! how could she have so misunderstood him? He wanted to wait until he could see her father and make formal application for her hand.

"Good-bye, then, Mr. Egerton," she said, blushing.

"Good-bye, Miss Waters. Ah! if you knew what an effort it costs me to tear myself away!"

He put out his hand, and she let hers rest in it while she timidly looked up with a parting appeal:

"You will not tell? you will not break mamma's heart—and mine?"

"Is there not something which ought to cast out fear?" he answered, and gave her hand a long, tender pressure.

There was not time to say more, as the servant, who had been already beckoned, was now close beside them. In another moment Randal was in the saddle, waving his hand by way of final adieu, while his impatient horse made a rapid start forward.

But enough had been said to satisfy Emmy. As she looked after him with that farewell pressure still warm on her hand, and those farewell words still ringing in her ear, she felt strong enough in her perfect love to cast out fear a hundred times over. Yes, of course she could trust him—trust him even as herself. Was he not part of herself now? How strange it was to think of—the heir of the Clare Court Egertons—so highly born and aristocratically connected—so handsome too, and of such a gallant bearing—ah! how noble he looked riding down the road yonder on that curveting steed which he managed so gracefully! Very different from John Thwaites, indeed! Well, perhaps John Thwaites would be sorry when he heard.

She roused herself and moved forward to the gate in a much happier frame of mind than when she last passed through it. Just as she was about to enter, however, it was opened from the inside, and to her great surprise, her mother, ready equipped for walking, appeared on the threshold.

"What! mamma, you are going out to-day! I thought you were too tired."

"So I was, but I have just heard something that has made me quite well again;" and indeed Emmy, looking more particularly, was quite struck with the unwontedly bright expression of her mother's face. "I have just had news from—" here Mrs. Waters dropped her voice and gave a jealous glance round—"you know who, Emmy dear."

Emmy did know directly, and felt a very disagreeable sinking at her heart in consequence.

"Indeed! He is back in England, then?"

"Yes, in Chorcombe. I have had a letter from the inn to say he was just setting out for Egerton Park, and would call here on his way back. And I am going down to see if I can meet him: your papa may bring home Mr. Tovey or somebody to dinner, and I want to see him first alone. Dear Emmy, I am so glad!"

"Dear mamma! yes I quite understand you should be pleased."

"You will be very careful, darling, will you not? But I am sure I need say nothing about that. You have never broken a promise to your mother yet, and I am sure you never will."

"Oh! of course I will be careful," stammered Emmy, passing her mother rather quickly on her way to the house. "I—I think I will go in now; it is very cold."

She went in accordingly, but she did not re-enter nearly so well satisfied with herself as she had been just before. On the contrary, her conscience smote her very heavily. She was sorry that she had not remembered how very soon her uncle might return, sorry that she had not thought more of her promise to her mother, sorry almost that she had met Randal that day at all. Oh! if any harm should come of what she had said; if—

Ah! but no harm would come, no harm could come. Had he not told her to trust him? had he not told her to cast out fear? and did he not love her far too well to break his word? How then could she doubt him? Why, even her mother, if her mother could know all, would understand that there was no danger.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A THUNDERBOLT.

"I WONDER what I have done that I should be so happy."

The words were spoken by Olivia, as, with her hand locked in that of her betrothed, she sat in the same room where she had parted from him last, now made bright by the level rays of the winter sunset, and brighter still by the presence of fulfilled hope and entire content. Her lover had returned, never to part from her again, and she felt as though she had nothing more left to wish for.

He smiled into her eyes with a look of unutterable fondness.

"And what have I done, Olivia? That is a great deal more puzzling. For I do not believe it is in the power of any mortal creature to deserve a tithe of the gladness that is mine to-day."

"Ah! but you deserve it all, and a hundred times more. You need never expect to get your deserts, for there is nothing and nobody in the world good enough for you."

"Little one! little one!" he said, stroking her hand caressingly, "why will you not flatter a trifle more soberly, so that I may have the pleasure of trying to believe you really mean it?"

"But I am not flattering," she protested. "I am only saying what is true—what is true to me, at least. You are not perfect, I suppose, because nobody can be perfect; but to me, I confess—I wonder if you ever did any thing wrong? I certainly can not imagine it."

"You can not?" and this time with the caressing tenderness of his manner was mingled something of earnestness. "My own darling! Well, perhaps you may be right in thinking I would not wish to do any thing outrageously wicked," he added laughing.

"Oh! wicked—I didn't mean that, but I wonder if you have ever done any thing weak or foolish? I suppose you have—of course you have; but somehow I can't realize the fact. Do you ever make mistakes, Harry? Tell me."

A strange look came over his face—so strange that Olivia would have been afraid that she had said something to vex him, only that she could not imagine him vexed by such a trifle.

"Mistakes! oh yes! grand mistakes sometimes. And as for never doing any thing weak or foolish, I often wonder whether there is any one in the world who can match me at it."

"Now don't look so serious, Harry, or I shall be thinking you mean something personal. Perhaps you consider it weak and foolish to have any thing to do with me—is that what you want to imply?"

But he did not repel the imputation nearly so emphatically as she had expected.

"My dearest love! Well, who knows? if I had been stronger and wiser, I should not have been so selfish. For I have been very selfish with you, Olivia—more selfish than I could have believed of myself before I was tempted."

"Selfish in not running away from me when you discovered that you were not to have the pleasure of rescuing me from absolute pauperism! I do call you selfish now, Harry, and cruel and unkind into the bargain. You see that you have made me happy—oh! so happy—and then you go regretting it. But it is too late to regret it

now—you can not take my happiness away, neither you nor any one else."

"God grant indeed it never may be taken away, my treasure!"

"It never can be taken away, Harry; you may think me presumptuous to say so, but it never can, no, not even by death itself. Death might put an end to it, but could not take it away, could not annul the past, could not turn that which has been into that which has not been. And there has been happiness for me, Harry—yes, thanks to you, there has been happiness for me."

As she spoke she raised her dark eyes to his face with an expression which made him forget every thing else. He looked down at her in turn, and a glance was exchanged between them which, while it lasted, seemed to admit each into the inmost recesses of the other's soul.

Just then a gentle tap sounded at the door—a tap which, gentle as it was, effectually recalled Olivia to a consciousness of the outer world, and made her draw her hand very hastily from that of her lover as, with an unwonted sense of flurry and embarrassment, she responded:

"Come in."

A servant entered with a letter.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Randal Egerton wished me to give you this immediately."

"Mr. Randal Egerton! He has been calling, then?" said Olivia; but she asked the question as much by way of concealing her own confusion as because she cared for an answer.

"Yes, ma'am. I told him I thought you were engaged, and he said he would not give you the trouble of seeing him, but would write a note in the library. He told me I was to give it to you directly he went away."

"Oh, indeed!" said Olivia. "Thank you, that will do."

She took the letter, and was in the act of slipping it away into her pocket, when the man, perhaps noticing that she was disposed to treat it rather negligently, turned round, as he reached the door, to add:

"Mr. Egerton said it was very important, if you please, ma'am."

"Had you not better open it at once?" suggested Mr. Graham as the servant withdrew.

"Perhaps I had," said Olivia, and mechanically broke the seal—very mechanically, for she did not feel capable just now of interesting herself in any the most important subject on which Randal might have to consult her. "It is from my cousin Randal—one of those cousins I once told you about, you know."

And thus saying she let her glance rest languidly on the lines before her, feeling, however, for the first few moments almost under a physical inability to give them the attention necessary for their comprehension.

Suddenly two or three words, becoming as it were detached from the rest, caught her eye; and though it could hardly be said that they bore with them to her understanding any definite meaning, she felt as she read them a great rush of blood to her heart which nearly took away her senses. But, stunned and half stupefied as she was, she still kept her gaze riveted on the letter. She was almost as incapable as at first of studying it with any thing like clearness of apprehension; but the sight of those two or three wor-

had already made this difference in her, that for the time she had no faculty of attention left for any thing save what might be set down on that paper.

What was set down there ran as follows:

"MY DEAR OLIVIA,—How much it grieves me to write as I am about to write just now you will perhaps never understand, as I have too much reason to believe that you are either wholly unable or wholly unwilling to appreciate the depth of the regard which I have always felt towards you. But that very regard makes it imperative on me to pursue a course so painful that with one I cared for less I know not if I should have courage to adopt it. Olivia, my dear cousin, call up all the native vigor of your character to enable you to hear the worst, and not to hate me for telling it. I have just learned on indisputable authority—authority which, if necessary, I am prepared to produce—that the man on whom you have lavished your generous affections, the man who, as I hear, is even now presumptuously intruding himself on your presence, is or has been a fugitive from justice under an assumed name. The real name of the person you have known as Graham is Harold Maxwell. He is the brother of Mrs. Waters, and some years ago forged the name of old Gilbert Waters on a check or other such document. If you doubt what I say, I shall be able to bring proofs and witnesses to substantiate it; but the best proof will probably be the demeanor of the wretched man himself, on being confronted with this accusation. Dear Olivia, forgive me that I have been obliged to write thus much, and believe me, now and ever, your affectionate

RANDAL EGERTON."

"Need I add that you may rely on my honor (knowing your feelings towards me as I do, I dare not use a warmer word) to preserve every thing which I have now told you inviolably locked in my own breast? Whatever rumors I may hereafter hear as to the reasons of any change which this communication may make in your movements, be sure that the dreadful truth will never be divulged by me."

As Olivia's eyes travelled over these lines, she could not properly be described as understanding them; for her power of understanding, and indeed of all conscious thought whatever, was for the time in nearly complete abeyance. But, little able as she would have been to render any account of what had happened, her heart was beating all the time as if it would burst, while through her memory there passed unbidden a strange series of vague images and recollections which, all bearing on the subject of the letter, showed that her mind was actively at work, though involuntarily and almost unconsciously, as that of a dreamer. A hundred little incidents of her first acquaintance with her lover—the excitement of Mrs. Waters's manner on the announcement of his coming, the tête-à-tête walk on the beach next morning, the unexpected effusiveness of congratulation with which the news of the engagement had been received, and so on in almost infinite succession—incidents which at the time had passed almost unnoticed—crowded back upon her now, and, though she hardly knew what had suggested them, weighed on her brain with a press-

ure that was almost maddening. Then, equally unbidden, there rose up in her mind a dim recollection of having heard from somebody soon after her first arrival in the neighborhood of a forgery committed long ago by a relation of Mrs. Waters, and of having treated the information with contempt as a paltry endeavor to shake her estimation of her friends for a fault not their own. She did not understand, or try to understand, what made the information treated so lightly then of such terrible personal import to her now, but nevertheless the mere vague memory of that piece of idle or ill-natured gossip seemed to send a death-chill through all her veins.

"Olivia, what is the matter?" she heard an anxious voice say at last.

It was her lover's voice, and its sound recalled her to herself at once. She knew now of what he was accused, of what she had during those few dreadful moments half suspected him, and an impulse shot through her of indomitable love and pride and tenderness. What a wretch had she been to let her trust for one-tenth of a second waver!

"Nothing is the matter," she said, looking up with clear calm eyes into which the light had returned as if by magic. "A lying letter, hardly worth the pains of reading or contradicting. I show it you because I wish to show you all my letters now."

With steady hand she gave him the letter, and then looked away while he read it—she scorned to seem as though she were watching its effect.

She kept her eyes averted for nearly a minute, during which there was no sound save a rustling of paper; then, wondering at the silence, she looked round.

He was sitting with drooping head and parted lips almost ashy in their paleness, gazing with vacant eyes at the letter, which had fluttered out of his trembling fingers to the floor. As Olivia saw, a freezing fear fell upon her.

"It is not true?" she articulated, but her throat was so dry that she had to repeat the words before they were audible. "It is not true"—Harry, she was about to add, but something rose up and would not let the name pass her lips.

He did not answer, but his head drooped lower on his chest, and his hands clenched themselves convulsively.

"Why do you not speak?" she demanded passionately.

He raised his head slightly, and answered in low suppressed accents:

"Because I have nothing to say."

"Nothing to say! It is true, then, that you—"

"It is true that I am Harold Maxwell—yes."

Olivia sat as one on whom a thunderbolt has fallen. A kind of darkness seemed to descend on her spirit which for a time took away, not consciousness exactly, but thought and motion and feeling itself; it was as if the whole world were coming to an end. Presently this cloud lifted itself off, and, with a painful spasm about the muscles of her throat that threatened to suffocate her, she returned to something like a sense of what had happened—of her wasted and worse than wasted love, of her boasted happiness annihilated, and not only annihilated, but turned to bitter shame and lasting degradation. Ah! as she realized it all, she sprang to her feet as though she had been stung.

"Begone from my house this instant! Your presence here is contamination—would be contamination in any honest dwelling. Do you hear me? go—or if it is possible that I should scorn and abhor you more than I do already—"

"Olivia!" he cried, starting up. He made a step towards her, so impetuously that she thought he was about to break into vehement denial, or even to catch her in his arms. But immediately afterwards the flush which had all at once risen to his cheek died away, his head slowly drooped anew upon his chest, and he stood pale and motionless before her in the attitude of one who can make no defense.

"You have the right to speak to me as you will, Miss Egerton," he said in a stifled voice. "It was a crime in me to aspire to your hand under any circumstances, but certainly when I discovered that you were rich—"

"Discovered!" echoed Olivia contemptuously. Ah! the poor fool that she had been ever to believe in that transparent mockery, through which her cousin Randal had seen so easily—through which any one must have seen who was not infatuated like herself! And to think of the melodramatic little scene she had been at the pains of getting up in order to increase the surprise of the disclosure! Oh! fool! fool!

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely. "You do not believe—"

"I do not," said Olivia with a curling lip. "What I do believe is that there was a plot to secure my property, from which my good fortune, and not my good sense, has preserved me."

A red spot started to his forehead, and a visible tremor ran through his whole frame; then, drawing himself up to his full height, he smiled bitterly and answered:

"If you believe that, I have nothing more to say."

"There is nothing more that can be said. Go—this is my house, and you are not welcome in it."

Again he trembled, then, glancing up quickly, appeared about to speak. But if he had any such intention, he abandoned it almost as soon as formed, and, once more lowering his eyes, moved towards the door without a word. Olivia thought she saw him stagger as he went, but then Olivia's own brain was reeling, so that the very ground seemed to heave beneath her.

The door opened, the door closed, footsteps sounded in the hall, then on the gravel without, and she knew that she was alone—alone with her misery and her degradation. And no sooner did she know it than, with an abrupt relaxation of the energy of indignation which had upheld her hitherto, she sank back into her chair, unconscious of nothing but that she had endured till she could endure no more.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MRS. WATERS FINDS OUT.

MEANTIME Mrs. Waters, closely muffled in veil and shawl, was slowly pacing up and down a solitary strail of highway near one of the gates of Egerton Park, being the most unfrequented part of the road leading thence to the Laurels. As she had told Emmy, she wished to see her broth-

er alone (at Nidbourne Emmy's vigilance had made it difficult for her to exchange with him in private more than a few words at a time), and she felt that she would be able to speak to him with less danger of interruption out of doors than in her own house. Then she had an important fact to communicate to him—the unavoidable admission of Emmy into the secret of his identity—a fact which might be necessary to explain any change observable in the girl's manner towards him, and which Mrs. Waters consequently wished him to know if possible beforehand.

She had waited thus some time, and began to fear that she would after all not find the desired opportunity that day, for the shades of the winter evening were already rapidly falling, and she understood that the interview between the newly reunited lovers could hardly fail to be a long one. At last, just as she was getting tired of waiting, and was about resigning herself to return home with the object of her walk unfulfilled, she saw the figure of a man coming down the road from the direction of Egerton Park. He was still at some distance, but in a moment she knew her brother's gait, and went forward with quickened pace to meet him. Apparently he must have recognized her too, for as she drew nearer she saw him advancing with long eager strides which showed him to have some reason for making great haste.

But no, he had not seen her—he did not see her even when, throwing back her veil, she went up with extended hand to greet him—but hastened onward without even turning his head in her direction.

"Why, Harry!" she said, seeing that he was about to pass her without recognition.

He started, and, coming to an abrupt halt, looked round, but with a perplexed air which showed that even now he did not very clearly know who had called him.

"Harry!" she said again; then, suddenly struck by a certain haggard vacant look about him which in the gathering obscurity she had not yet noticed, she added anxiously: "What is the matter? Are you ill? Oh! Harry, you know me, surely?"

"Agnes! Oh yes! I know you. But why have you stopped me?"

"You are ill!" she cried, laying her hand on his arm with an impulse of terrified affection.

"I—I don't know—perhaps; I am not very well. But I must go on now."

"Go on! What do you want to do? Where are you going?"

"I don't know—somewhere— I will write to you."

"Harry! stop!" she cried imploringly, for he had disengaged himself from her as he spoke.

"What is it? what has happened? what—"

"I will write," he repeated.

And, with a wave of his hand, he was once more striding forward on his way.

She made a few uncertain steps after him, but he was already far beyond her reach, and presently had disappeared from view altogether behind a corner of the road.

The poor lady was ready to faint with agitation and alarm. What was the matter? Was he mad? The wildness of his words, of his gestures, of his whole manner almost seemed to suggest it. Or was it possible that any exte-



could it be that something had happened there? Olivia was ill perhaps, or dead, or had proved fickle, or possibly— He could not have told Olivia any thing, surely! Oh! what could it all be? And how was it possible to wait without knowing, or without going mad herself with the uncertainty?

She looked round with an instinctive seeking for help out of an agony of suspense which she felt to be unendurable. There, hardly farther off than her brother had been when first she saw him, were the gray walls and overhanging trees of Egerton Park—the place whence he had come in such wild excitement, the place where certainly something must be known by some one as to the cause of that excitement. Why, then, that was the place for her to have her doubts set at rest! And no sooner had the idea occurred to her than she hastened blindly forward, with no thought of the difficulty of knowing how to frame and to whom to address her inquiries, with no thought of any thing save her brother's pale face and choking disjointed words.

With that face and those words haunting her memory and ringing in her ears, she reached the gate of Egerton Park and made her way up the avenue. Presently she found herself at the door of the house waiting for admission, and for the first time realized the necessity of not allowing her emotion to betray her.

"Can I see Miss Egerton?" she asked as calmly as she could of the servant who answered her summons.

"Yes, ma'am; will you please to walk this way? Miss Egerton is quite alone," said the man, who had happened to see Mr. Graham leave the house, and knew that this was a visitor whom his mistress always made welcome.

With faltering steps she followed him to the well-known door of Olivia's favorite sitting-room, which he flung open, announcing:

"Mrs. Waters."

There was a quick rustle of drapery as of some one making a sudden change of position. It was nearly dark by this time, but from that sound and a transient glimpse she had caught as the door was opened, the visitor could almost have believed that Olivia had been sitting with her face buried in her hands. But, however that may have been, Olivia was sitting erect enough now.

Mrs. Waters was fully alive at length to the difficulty of her task. How was she to set about her interrogations, at the same time concealing the depth of the personal interest which prompted them? But she was there, and it was necessary to say something—the more necessary as Olivia, apparently failing to recognize her in that uncertain light, had merely turned her face towards the door inquiringly, without making any attempt at welcome.

"Miss Egerton!" began Mrs. Waters as soon as the servant had withdrawn, and she made a hesitating step forward.

Olivia started up from her chair; it was evident that if she had previously had any doubt as to who the visitor might be, she had none now.

"You!" she exclaimed.

In that one syllable was concentrated such fire of mingled scorn and bitterness that Mrs. Waters knew at once that all was over.

For a while there was a silence in the room as of death, and then Olivia asked sternly:

"What do you want here? Are you not satisfied with the wrong you have done me, that you come to insult me with this intrusion?"

"The wrong I have done you!" said Mrs. Waters faintly.

"Yes, or helped your brother Harold Maxwell to do me, if you like it better. It is much the same."

As the brother's name reached the sister's ears, it thrilled through her as with an electric shock.

"You know, then?" she stammered. "You know that—that—"

"I know every thing," said Olivia haughtily.

Mrs. Waters became so giddy that she had to cling to a chair for support.

"Every thing! Do you really mean it? Every thing!"

"Yes, I really mean it, every thing—that your brother is a forger and a thief, and that I have been the weakest, blindest fool who ever fell into the hands of an accomplished professional!"

"Oh!" broke in Mrs. Waters with a cry of pain.

Olivia looked at her scornfully.

"What is the matter? Are you afraid that I shall try to punish him? You may set your mind at rest; I am too proud—too weak and silly, perhaps I ought to say—to expose my own imbecility to the world for the mere sake of being revenged. The secret is safe with me; if that is what you came about, you may go away quite satisfied."

Mrs. Waters answered nothing—only stood as though thunderstruck, and Olivia, after waiting a moment, resumed:

"It seems to me that every thing has been said that it can possibly be necessary to say between us—now or at any future time, I hope you understand. I wish you good-evening."

She fixed her eyes on the drooping form before her coldly and severely, and with stately step and erect bearing passed from the room.

Mrs. Waters, left alone, bowed her head in a very agony of despair.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE NEWS TOLD AT THE LAURELS.

How Mrs. Waters reached home that day she herself hardly knew. All the way nothing was present to her mind but the image of her brother, haggard and half-delirious as she had seen him last; and she was scarcely conscious of where she was or whither she was going. But she knew the road by heart, and, instinctively following it, arrived at her own door just as night was closing in.

No sooner had she entered than she made straight for the library—the room where Austin was generally wont to spend the hour before dinner reading newspapers, or revising plans and estimates.

He was there now, sitting before the fire with a newspaper in his hand, which however he was not just then studying, but held hanging loosely downward, while his eyes were turned thoughtfully towards the blaze. Mrs. Waters shut the door, and, having glanced cautiously round the

well-lighted room to assure herself that he was quite alone, made a step forward as though about to speak. But in the mean while, disturbed by the noise she had made in entering, he looked round, and, before she had time to say any thing, began impatiently:

"Is that you, Agnes? Where on earth have you been? I thought you were never coming, and I have been wanting so to speak to you. Come here. Make haste; I tell you I have something to speak to you about."

"What is it?" she asked feverishly, for she thought he was going to tell her something about her brother.

"Look here—this confounded paper—not that it is any use to mind what such rascals say, of course, for they'll say any thing to fill up, but it worries a man, for all that. Look here—this paragraph."

He thrust the paper into her hand, pointing to a particular passage. She looked hurriedly; her mind was so full of her brother that, without considering probabilities, she could only imagine that her attention was being called to some statement concerning him—something which, seen by Olivia, had led to the fatal discovery of that day.

But her eyes only wandered helplessly among a tangle of words which for her had not the slightest meaning, interspersed here and there with unfamiliar names and unintelligible figures.

"Don't you see it?" cried Austin fretfully. "Here, I tell you—have you no eyes?"

He pointed again, and then she saw that the paragraph to which he was directing her attention was the following, inserted in the midst of a column headed "Monetary and Commercial:—"

"We have pleasure in being authorized to announce that the unfavorable reports which prevailed last week as to the condition of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company are entirely devoid of foundation. The conspicuous union of prudence and vigor which characterizes the administration of this undertaking, no less than the well-known wealth of some of its principal shareholders, constitutes a sufficient guaranty for the entire fallaciousness of all sinister rumors."

"Haven't you read it yet?" demanded Austin gruffly, noticing perhaps the listless look with which his wife's eyes rested on these lines.

"About the Anglo-Cosmopolitan?" she said, with a mechanical attempt to humor him. "Yes, dear, very satisfactory, is it not? The unfavorable reports are not true, you see."

"Satisfactory! are you a fool? Confound it! who thought that there were any unfavorable reports at all? Of course I know very well they are not true—that's no news."

"Certainly, dear."

"And don't you go thinking I care much what those lying papers say, one way or another—they'll put in any thing for money, and that's just a kind of thing I could fancy the editor making up out of his own head if the column wasn't long enough. But it's a damned infernal shame they should be allowed to go on so—that's what I complain of."

"Austin," broke out Mrs. Waters, no longer

able to restrain her impatience, "I have something to say to you—something very particular. I have just seen Harry."

Austin's face did not grow any brighter at the intelligence.

"What! he has come back, then?"

"Yes; he wrote to me this morning, and I went towards Egerton House to try to meet him. And I did meet him, Austin; and oh! if you could only have seen how he looked! He would not stop to speak, but I knew at once that something must have happened."

"Something happened! what? Speak out—what is the matter?"

"And I went on to Egerton House, and I saw Miss Egerton, and—oh! it kills me to think of it. It is all over between them; she has found out who he is, and—"

"Found out!" articulated Austin in a choking voice. His eyes glared at her, so that they seemed ready to drop from their sockets, while his chest heaved with quick convulsive gasps which made her fear to see him fall to the ground from sheer want of breath.

"No, no, not that," she protested hastily—"not that, I do assure you. Only that he is my brother—indeed, indeed that is all."

"Is that all really?" he said, and seemed to grow a shade calmer.

"Yes, really it is, and if you could but hear the cruel bitter things— She hates him as much as ever she used to love him, I am sure. And he—ah! I believe he has gone away to die."

"He has gone away, then?" asked Austin, with what appeared to be an eager catching at the words.

"Yes, he has gone away, and oh! so wretched as he is! If you had only seen him, Austin! you would feel for him as I do. He loved her so dearly, and now to be hated and despised—"

"It was all your fault, Agnes. Why did you ever let them come together? I knew from the first it could bring no good."

"What would you have had me do? I could not come between him and his happiness—you would not have wished me, surely. Ah! Austin, you have spoken unkindly sometimes, but I know you have never meant it; I know you have never forgotten how much—"

"Of course not, of course not—how could I? And I am sure any thing I thought really calculated to promote his happiness I would have made every sacrifice in my power—"

"I know you would, dear Austin, I know it. Oh yes! you have always loved him, always remembered what he has done for you, as he remembered what you had done for him—always, however vexed and harassed you have sometimes been with your own troubles. And you are sorry for him now that he is so miserable—ah! I see you are."

"Nobody could be sorrier, I am sure. Only I always said—"

"Austin," she went on quickly, for she had reached the point she had been aiming at throughout—"do you know what I have been thinking? I have been thinking that it is our duty to go and tell Miss Egerton every thing."

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed, grasping her almost savagely by the arm. "Every thing! what do you mean?"

Her heart sank within her as she saw his

fierce excited look, but she made shift to answer with external calmness.

"I mean what I say—every thing. Ah! for his sake who has done so much for you—"

He gnashed his teeth, and tightened his hold on her arm so that she nearly cried out with the pain.

"Never. Do you hear me? Never, never, never!"

"Austin, dear Austin—"

"What! you call me dear, and you want me to tell the world—"

"Only her, Austin, only her. Ah! think a little of him—"

"Think of me: do you want to kill me—do you want me to kill myself? Only her! only all Chorcombe, you mean—only all the world; it would come to the same thing. After all I have gone through! I tell you, no—it shall not be—never—do you hear me—do you?"

He looked at her in a way that made her tremble for him as she saw, and, understanding that all further persuasion would be useless, she hastened to allay as far as might be the storm she had raised.

"If this is how you feel, I will say no more," she rejoined soothingly, and yet with a certain severity of manner which, strive as she would, she could not quite suppress. "I have proposed what I thought was an act of justice, but—"

"Justice! Was it my fault he came here? was it my fault he came back to England at all? Did I want to see him, do you think? And because he chooses to run his head against a wall, am I to suffer—"

"I will say no more—surely that may content you. Oh! Austin, try—"

But a new idea had just occurred to him, disturbing him so violently that she might as well have spoken to the raging sea or wind.

"Perhaps you have told her already!" he cried, almost with a shriek.

"No, I have not, upon my honor. Oh! Austin, you may believe me, indeed you may—I am too great a coward to be so ready to tell what it breaks my heart even to think of."

"He has told her then—it is all the same."

"He has not, I swear he has not. Do you not know him better? He has promised, and he never broke a promise yet."

"Yes, he has promised, I know that," muttered Austin, evidently somewhat tranquilized by the argument—"and promised so that he could not break his word without being the greatest villain alive. But why did he put himself in the way of breaking it? That's what I want to be told. Why did he come—"

"He has gone away now," interrupted the wife bitterly; "will not that satisfy you?"

"If I were sure he really were gone; if I were sure— But he will come back again, confound him—he will come back again."

She looked at him very coldly, more coldly perhaps than ever she had done in her life before. She was thinking of her brother and of the circumstances under which she had seen him last, and for the time forgot all her compassion for one who could speak of him with so little sympathy.

Austin probably saw something of her feelings, for he resumed with a slightly shamefaced air: "There, I didn't mean quite to say that; I can't stop to consider every word. You know

very well how I look on him—just like my own brother, I'm sure, as of course I ought. But when you think of all I have gone through, you can not wonder that I should be afraid."

"You have nothing to be afraid of," she answered quietly. "He is gone, and will not trouble you by coming back again—not even if he lives," she added more harshly.

He drew a long breath, then, after a pause, went on with new anxiety:

"And what will people think when they hear that we have had him with us—under our roof—a person whom every body knows to have been accused—"

"Very likely they would only think you a good brother-in-law for having forgiven him," said Mrs. Waters; and this time she spoke in tones which sounded almost sarcastic in their suppressed bitterness. "But you need not be afraid of that either; Miss Egerton expressly told me that for her own sake she would not expose him."

"Why, then, it may all be as though this had never happened?" said Austin, his brow perceptibly clearing.

"So far as you are concerned, yes."

She glanced up at him as though about to add something very cutting, but he was looking so worn and gaunt and tremulous, so altogether unlike the hale hearty man who had been the husband of her youth, that she could not find it in herself to reproach him.

"You have nothing to be afraid of," she repeated, and then, feeling her eyes filling with tears which were no longer to be restrained, she hurried towards the door. She knew that there was no comfort for her in that room.

He did not attempt to detain her, and immediately afterwards she found herself, with a full heart, on her way up stairs.

She had reached the upper landing, and was pausing at the door of her own chamber, when she saw coming along the dimly-lighted corridor a slight tripping figure which for years she had always associated with the idea of support and consolation. She had never needed support and consolation more than she did just now, and instinctively she waited for the little figure to come up.

"Is that you, darling?" she said; but indeed she knew very well who it was without asking.

"Why, mamma! What! you have only just come in? I am ready dressed for dinner, you see, and going down to the drawing-room. You won't be long, will you?"

"No. But—don't go down yet, dear. Come into my room for a few minutes first."

The poor mother felt a craving for sympathy that was absolutely irresistible.

"Certainly, mamma dear," and Emmy followed her mother into the room with great alacrity. She was in good spirits, or at least felt that she ought to be in good spirits, which in some cases amounts to much the same thing. And certainly she could not fail to feel that she ought to be in good spirits after the implied declaration of love which she had that day received from Randal Egerton.

"Emmy darling, come and kiss me," said Mrs. Waters, sinking exhausted into a chair as soon as the door was closed. "I am very, very miserable."

"Mamma! dear mamma!" cried Emmy, running up and throwing her arms round her mother's neck. "My own sweet mamma, what is the matter?"

"I am so glad I was obliged to tell you what I did once, Emmy," murmured Mrs. Waters, quite clinging to the plump little arms cast so protectingly round her; "it is such a comfort to be able to speak freely to you. Miss Egerton has found out about—about—you know what I mean, Emmy. Every thing is at an end, and oh! I am so unhappy."

Emmy felt a cold perspiration stand on her forehead as she heard. She thought of Randal, and the confession he had extorted from her during that pleasant walk home. Was it possible—

"Found out about—about Uncle Harold, do you mean? Oh! mamma, surely you must be mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken, I saw them both—first him, and then Miss Egerton. And oh! Emmy, he looked so wretched! I am afraid he will never get over it."

Emmy was in dreadful tribulation. Still it was utterly impossible that the discovery should be in the remotest degree due to any act of hers—utterly. He never could have betrayed her—he who had looked so tenderly into her eyes and bid her cast out fear, he who loved her with such evident depth of passionate devotion, he with whom her destiny was henceforth inseparably linked. But naturally she could not help being very much concerned.

"How did it happen?" she asked in a shaking voice. "Did any one tell her? But then no one could have known. How can it have happened?"

"I have no idea," said Mrs. Waters mournfully. "Whether he may have said something about his past life to make her suspect, and then from one thing to another—and yet I can't think that likely, either. You never breathed a word about it to any one, Emmy, I am certain?"

"Oh mamma!" said Emmy. It was all that she was able to answer for the moment, but it was a sufficient answer for her mother, in whose ears the exclamation sounded quite reproachfully.

"Oh! of course I was quite sure it could not be through you, my darling."

"You may be quite sure indeed, mamma," said Emmy earnestly. The more she reflected, the more certain she became that it was not and could not be through her, and she felt that she might look her mother in the face and tell her so with a clear conscience. Why, it was not two hours yet since Randal had parted from her with that farewell assurance of fidelity and love, and that farewell pressure of the hand which, without any spoken assurance at all, would have been a sufficient pledge of his feelings towards her—not two hours. So that if he had been Olivia's informant he must have gone straight from her presence to Egerton House, must have left her with the express purpose of betraying her. It was really very satisfactory to be provided with such an answer to any doubts of his prudence which, had the discovery been made a few days or weeks later, might otherwise have arisen in her mind.

"Poor dear mamma," she resumed caressingly, having completely restored her own self-satisfaction by this course of reasoning, "I am so very sorry for you."

"I knew you would be, dear child."

"Yes, and for him too," rejoined Emmy generously, for the sight of her mother's grief had thoroughly softened her—"for him too. I am sure he was quite a changed character, and I believe I should have got to like him very much in time, and really to look upon him almost as an uncle, though of course most people— Oh! mamma," she exclaimed, breaking off, for a horrid idea had just presented itself, "what will be thought of us for having forgiven him so far, for having actually had him in our house and introduced him to our friends? Oh! I am afraid the remarks we shall hear will be quite terrible."

Yes, and the remarks would reach the ears of Randal Egerton and his family; that was worst of all. They could make no difference to his feelings, of course, but he could not fail to be very much annoyed.

"You think of that too?" said Mrs. Waters with a strange smile. "You need not be afraid, neither you nor your father. Miss Egerton has promised to keep our secret for us, and he has gone away, never to trouble you again. You have nothing to fear—all the misery, all the disgrace is borne by him alone."

Emmy felt considerable relief at hearing that this was the case, though, observing that her mother had spoken rather bitterly, she did not exactly like to express it.

"I am sure I am as sorry for him as any one can be," she said with an air of apology. "But you know, mamma dear, it is really only natural—"

"Oh yes! I dare say it is natural enough—of course it is," assented Mrs. Waters, but still, as it appeared to Emmy, somewhat coldly. "There, you can go down stairs now, Emmy; I shall be better alone."

"You are not angry with me, mamma?"

"Oh no! why should I, poor child? But I shall be better alone—indeed."

It was manifest that Mrs. Waters, notwithstanding the craving for sympathy she had felt a few minutes before, really did wish to be left to herself now; so Emmy, having first kissed her mother's cheek very tenderly, tripped softly out of the room. She was not sorry herself to be alone again; she had been very much disturbed by the intelligence she had just heard, and now gladly let her thoughts revert to him whom she instinctively regarded as her chief comforter. Ah! how delightful to have some one to whom she could unbosom all her griefs, all her anxieties—some one of whose warm and undivided sympathy she could be quite sure! And such an one she would shortly have by her side—avowed in his true character to all the world; had he not promised to speak to her father, and had he not promised in so many words not to put off long? Oh yes! he would come very, very soon; and what loving comfort he would pour into her ear, what tender reproaches for the momentary doubt of him that she had felt!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### SUSPENSE.

"Is there nothing for me?" asked Mrs. Waters anxiously the next morning, when the letter-bag was laid as usual before her husband.

"Nothing this morning."

A look of intense disappointment fell on the poor wife's countenance. She had been racked all night with suspense concerning her brother, the memory of whose white face and distraught bloodshot eyes had hardly for an instant been absent from her thoughts, and she had looked forward with feverish impatience to the morning in the hope of receiving the tidings which he had promised. And now she was condemned to wait another day without knowing how he was bearing his misery, or if it had not crushed him altogether—in ignorance even of his whereabouts. She understood that she could hardly have expected news from him so soon, but the idea of having to wait longer for it was a kind of torture.

Emmy saw something of her mother's distress, and felt for it very deeply. She was perfectly sure that it could not have been brought about by any fault of hers, but still she could not help being a little self-reproachful in remembering that she had permitted herself to speak to a third person of a secret the importance of which Mrs. Waters's pale cheeks and care-worn look impressed upon her more forcibly than ever it had been impressed before. She felt that she had, however harmlessly, committed a breach of confidence; and in spite of her conviction that under the exceptional circumstances of the case no evil had come, or by any possibility could come, of her imprudence, she was perhaps more moved by the sight of her mother's anxiety than she would have been if her conscience had been quite clear. So she sat unusually silent and depressed, leaving the room, as soon as breakfast was over, expressly in order to give her parents an opportunity of discussing the matter in her absence.

The opportunity so considerably made was, however, not profited by. The name of Harold Maxwell was probably uppermost in Austin's mind as it was in his wife's—indeed her visible suffering must alone have sufficed to remind him of it—but it was not mentioned by either. He made a few comments on sundry items of news in that morning's paper, and, among other things, remarked how very satisfactory it was to have such good accounts of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan from Frisby; for that gentleman had looked in last night, and laughed to scorn the idea of unfavorable reports having been in circulation. And Mrs. Waters agreed that it was very satisfactory indeed, but said not a word to show that any other subject was in her thoughts.

The truth was, she was conscious that on the one subject which just now lay next her heart her husband and herself were out of sympathy, and that it was therefore best avoided between them. But this consciousness was in itself a serious aggravation of her wretchedness. They had been married more than five-and-twenty years, and this was the first time that she had been obliged to keep a grief to herself from such a cause.

She was able to speak more freely when Austin had gone out for the day, and she was alone with her daughter again. But though Emmy was very kind and caressing—even kinder and more caressing than usual—Emmy evidently did not wish to say much on this topic of her uncle Harold, and not much, therefore, was said. As may be supposed, the topic for Emmy was

not altogether a satisfactory one; besides which, she was too much taken up with her own concerns to be exactly in a sympathizing frame of mind. She was as sorry for her mother's unhappiness as she could be for any thing just now, but she was all day in a state of nervous excitement and expectation which made her incapable of fixing her thoughts on any idea save one for two minutes together. Every sound at the bell, every distant footstep out of doors, sent all her blood rushing to her heart. Was he coming to claim her—that high-born lover of hers to whom her troth was already virtually plighted, coming to lay his homage openly at her feet, and bring her mother comfort in the prospect of so brilliant a son-in-law? He had said he would come soon, and he would keep his word. *He* would not desert her and insult her, and make her ashamed of herself for having thought of him; he was not John Thwaites—no, indeed, but somebody very, very different.

Thus she continued waiting and watching all day; and when the evening approached and still the expected suitor had not made his appearance, her excitement hardly abated. He had not come to-day, but that made it only the more certain that he would come to-morrow.

The morrow arrived, but the morrow was only a repetition of the previous day. In the morning there was the same eager inquiry on Mrs. Waters's part for a letter, the same look of disappointment, only increased and intensified, on being told that there was none; and on Emmy's part the same feeling of remorse and self-reproach (perhaps a little increased too) at sight of her mother's grief, merging, as the day went on, into the same straining expectation on her own behalf, the same intent listening for slight sounds, the same waiting and watching, accompanied by the same certainty that she could not have to wait and watch long. She was sure that she might trust him; she could not doubt, remembering his parting words and his parting look. A thousand things might have happened to delay him; the days were so short and the roads were so bad—and then he had not positively fixed any time; he had only said "before long." She would not, could not let herself be discouraged; and when that day drew to a close without bringing him, she was still reasonable in her impatience, and once more looked forward to the morrow.

But another morrow came, and another, and another, and, in dreary succession, yet others after these, and still no Randal Egerton. She watched and listened and counted the hours, but the hours rolled on, and each new flash of hope only died out in new disappointment. Footsteps passed and re-passed, but none of them was his; from time to time a summons sounded at the bell, but his name was not announced.

She grew weary and sick with waiting, and kept conning and re-conning all that had passed at their last interview, as her only talisman against absolute despair. For still she did not despair—how could she, with the circumstances of that interview fresh in her memory? No man worthy the name of man could be guilty of the baseness of betraying her, and was it possible to suspect that he could be—he, Randal Egerton, one of the first gentlemen in the county? And then, while it was out of the question to imagine that he had deliberately broken his prom-

ise, there were so many causes which might account for unavoidable delay in its fulfillment. He might be ill, perhaps (ah! how grievous to think upon!), or some member of his family might be ill (not quite so bad that), or he might have been unexpectedly called away on business, or— Oh yes! there was only one thing which she might be quite sure of, and that was, that he could not be to blame. But though she kept on comforting herself so bravely, she grew every day more anxious and depressed, every day somehow more self-reproachful at sight of her mother's anxiety and depression.

For while Emmy had been waiting thus in vain, Mrs. Waters had been waiting in vain too. The expected letter from her brother had not come, and she was left ignorant where he had gone or where he intended to go—whether he was in health or sickness, whether he was alive or dead.

Perhaps it was because she was older and more experienced, perhaps because her temperament was naturally less sanguine; but waiting went a great deal harder with Mrs. Waters than with her daughter. While Emmy was always buoying herself up with bright expectations of what was going to happen, always comforting herself under disappointment with renewed hope, Mrs. Waters was a prey to the darkest fears, which when she tried to banish them only pressed on her more heavily and more persistently. He had promised to write, and, even without promising, would he not certainly have done so had he been alive and well? But he had not written—what, then, could she think? And he had looked so ill when she saw him last; even before there had been time for a letter to reach her she had been afraid of something happening. Something had happened, then—and what?

The most horrible visions were perpetually haunting her—of her brother tossing on a bed of sickness and delirium, dying perhaps in the midst of rough uncaring strangers—and even this was not the worst fear which tormented her. He had looked so wild and distracted as he parted from her, almost like one already irresponsible for his actions; who knew but that in his frenzy and his despair he might have been tempted—She dared not fully form the thought even in her own mind, and yet she could not keep it from constantly recurring.

To make her misery greater, she was unable, lest the motive of her interest should be suspected, to take any effectual steps towards setting her suspense at rest by inquiry. She had indeed the pain of hearing a good many rumors regarding Mr. Graham's sudden disappearance, which, with the lovers' quarrel that was its presumed cause, was naturally enough for a few days the theme of all the gossips of Chorcombe. But amidst all the idle talk and speculation to which she was condemned to listen, hardly any thing definite reached her ears, and what little did was not of a reassuring nature. It seemed pretty certain that he had left the town by railway, for he had been seen waiting at the station by a servant of the inn where he had put up in the morning. So far this information might have been satisfactory, as showing some coherency of thought and purpose; but when it was further said that this same servant had asked him what was to be done with his luggage left at the inn, that he had

answered with a promise to send for it next day, and that he had as yet failed to do so, Mrs. Waters could not but feel her worst apprehensions strengthened and confirmed. As the days followed each other, gradually swelling into weeks, and still she heard nothing, such intense anxiety took possession of her mind that it began to be a relief to her rather than a disappointment to be told each morning that there were no tidings. She could not now imagine any tidings that were not bad, and looked with dismay on every letter and every paper that came to the house lest it should contain the intelligence which she dreaded. Thus she went on, fearing more every day, and growing every day more and more miserable.

And meanwhile poor Emmy, though still hoping rather than fearing, went on growing more miserable also.

There was not a great deal said between mother and daughter at this time; the hearts of both were too full for either to feel inclined for much conversation. But Mrs. Waters noticed that Emmy was unwontedly subdued in spirits, and, ascribing the change altogether to sympathy with her own distress, was very much touched by it, and even comforted. It was pleasant to believe that there was one person in the world who felt for her, and in some degree with her, in her sorrow; and such a belief she could not entertain concerning her husband. It has been said that she had an instinct at the first that Austin was out of sympathy with her on the subject of her solicitude, and this instinct went on gathering force as time advanced. In proportion as she became more terrified and unhappy, it seemed to her that he grew more and more reassured; and at last she fancied that she could almost measure her own reason for apprehension by the standard of his comparative tranquillity. This being the case, she scrupulously avoided saying a word to him on the matter, and when from time to time her pent-up feelings forced their way to the surface, it was always her daughter whom she chose as a confidante.

"Dear Emmy," she said once when the girl was looking more than usually dejected, "how good you are to me! You have every thing to make you glad, and yet just because you see me grieving you are quite miserable. You must not be too unhappy on my account, my darling."

"I am very sorry for you of course, mamma," said Emmy, wincing a good deal as she thought how much less her mother's suffering had to do with her depression than her mother seemed to believe. "And I would give any thing, I'm sure, to see you happy again—that I would—any thing in the world. But I believe you are making yourself uneasy without cause, mamma dear, indeed I do. Take my word for it, it will all come right."

Perhaps these words of comfort were partly addressed to herself as well as to her mother. But Mrs. Waters never thought of that.

"It could not all come right," she answered mournfully, "unless he could be again what he was once to Miss Egerton. But if I could only think that he was alive, if I could only believe that he did not part from me that day to go to his death—"

"Oh! mamma, that is surely—"

"If you had seen him, Emmy, if you had but

seen him, you would understand why I am afraid. He was scarcely in his right mind even then."

"But, mamma, it is so much more likely that he has only left the country. Oh! depend upon it, in a few weeks you will be hearing from some place abroad—"

"A few weeks! And how am I to wait? Oh! child, you little know what I suffer! The suspense is killing me. If only I could try to find out, if only I had an idea of the direction he had taken, so that I might follow or make inquiries! But to have to sit here and wait and do nothing while he is dying perhaps—it will drive me mad."

"Oh! mamma pet, pray, pray don't talk so," expostulated Emmy. She did not add that her uncle Harold was scarcely worthy of being the object of such extreme solicitude, but the idea certainly passed through her mind.

"I can not help it, Emmy. I am miserable—so miserable that sometimes I think I am half mad already. All this came so suddenly, and I was so happy just before—every now and then I have a feeling that it can not have happened at all, that I have only been dreaming. How can she have found out? It seems impossible when one thinks of it, does it not?"

"It is very strange, no doubt," said Emmy, wining a little more this time. "But he is so good now that I suppose he must have felt it his duty to tell her how wicked he had been once; don't you think that was it, mamma?"

"That he told her himself, do you mean? You know nothing about it," said Mrs. Waters, rather more peremptorily than usual.

"Of course I can't say for certain, mamma, but I really think that when one considers how much it must have been on his conscience—"

"You know nothing about it," cried Mrs. Waters again; and then, somewhat abruptly, as though the conversation had suddenly become more painful than she could bear, she rose and left the room.

Emmy was a good deal surprised at finding Mrs. Waters reject thus decisively and almost angrily an explanation which in the girl's eyes seemed so eminently probable and natural. How blindly attached her mother was to that erring brother of hers, to be sure!—it looked sometimes as though she almost forgot that he had ever been guilty. But Emmy did not forget his guilt by any means, and, pondering it deeply in her own mind, became more and more impressed with the probability of her theory. What could be more likely than that her uncle Harold, possessing doubtless many good qualities, and constantly oppressed by the memory of his crime, should have been stung by Miss Egerton's generosity into making a full and unreserved confession? And then how could the truth have reached Miss Egerton's ears in any other way? Her mother, perhaps, if she knew all, might, blinded by morbid suspicion, imagine that Randal had told the terrible secret; but Emmy, with her eyes clear and wide open, saw plainly that this could not be. He was a gentleman, not a perjurer and a villain, and none but a perjurer and a villain could have been guilty of so foul an abuse of confidence. Why, look at John Thwaites, who had used her so badly; she might have trusted him with a thousand secrets and he would never have betrayed her—never, let him be as angry as he

would. Yes, there was that good in him certainly. And was it likely that Randal Egerton, who loved her and was a gentleman—Ah no!—a thousand times no. And he did love her; of course he loved her—there was no more doubt of that than there was of his being a gentleman. He had not come yet as he had promised, but the very length of the delay proved that something unusual must have happened to cause it. Even if that memorable walk had never taken place, it would have been his business to call by this time to pay his respects after the party; almost every other gentleman invited had done so, and certainly he would not have omitted so important a social duty till now under any ordinary circumstances. There was thus evidently some extraordinary detaining cause in operation, but that cause, whatever it was, must inevitably cease sooner or later, and then, as inevitably, he would come. Oh yes! he would come, she might look for him from day to day. But day after day passed, and she was left still hoping, as her mother was left still fearing.

Nearly three weeks had been spent in this weary waiting, and it was already within three or four days of Christmas, when one morning Mrs. Waters, watching intently as usual while her husband opened his letters, saw him, as he unfolded one of them, suddenly turn pale. Her own heart grew cold within her; had, the dreaded announcement come at last?

"What is it?" she asked faintly.

But before there was time for any answer to come, the letter had fallen from his hands, and with a cry he sank back helpless in his chair.

"Papa!" shrieked Emmy. "Are you ill?"

But Mrs. Waters's alarm was not just now for her husband, and, staggering forward, she lifted the fallen letter, and fastened her eyes on it as though she expected, as in truth she did, that it was to decide a question of life or death.

The letter, however, contained tidings altogether different from any she had looked for—so different indeed that it was some time before she could so much as understand what it was about. When at last, finding that its contents were not those she had expected, she grew sufficiently calm to wonder what they really might be, she saw that they ran as follows:

"1 Blue-Bag Buildings, Bedford Row,  
London, W. C., December 20th.

"DEAR SIR,—Finding, from documents now in my possession, that you are the most important shareholder in the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, as well as one of the few directors whose address is at present known, I feel it my duty as solicitor appointed by the Board to acquaint you of the existence of certain very painful rumors which there is too much reason to believe well-founded, and which it may be more agreeable to your feelings to be first apprised of through some other medium than that of the public press. In the unexpected absence, it is believed on the Continent, of the chairman and secretary of the company, it is impossible at this moment to enter into any full statement of particulars, but as far as can be judged, from the present aspect of affairs, it appears only too probable that the shareholders will have to be called upon for the greater part, if not the whole, of the

sums standing over on their respective shares, amounting to five times the paid-up capital.

"Trusting that this communication may reach you in time to avert any unpleasant surprise, I remain, dear sir, yours truly,

"JOSEPH SHARPLES."

"Is that all?" said Mrs. Waters when at last she understood, and, turning towards her husband, who was still leaning back prostrate and half fainting in his chair, she added, with a touch of severity in her voice: "Be a man, Austin; think how much worse news than this we might have heard."

"Worse! what could be worse?" he murmured, and his hands clenched themselves with spasmodic yet feeble violence. "Don't you see what he says about the money standing over—five times the amount? We shall be ruined—ruined outright."

"Ruined!" ejaculated Emmy, and in her turn caught up the letter, which her mother had now laid down.

"And if we are, we must learn to bear it," said Mrs. Waters calmly. "Austin, be brave; what good can this do?"

"Oh! my poor dear papa!" cried Emmy, after a glance at the letter, and rushed up to fling herself on her father's neck with a burst of sympathy the more demonstrative as she could not but think her mother strangely unfeeling. "My poor dear papa! But oh! don't speak like that, papa darling; it can't be so bad as they think, I am sure it can't; the horrid man must be mistaken. And even if it was all true, papa, we couldn't be what you said we were—you know we couldn't. What! ruined, and the Beacon Bay railway going to be made—what can I ever put such a thing into your head?"

She had struck the right chord. He raised himself slightly in his chair, and a faint flush came to his cheek, as though his blood were beginning to resume its natural flow.

"Ah! to be sure—the Beacon Bay railway. Say that again, child, say that again."

"What, papa, had you actually forgotten? But you see now how safe we are—you see now, don't you? Why, if we had lost every farthing, Beacon Bay would make it all up to us, over and over again."

"Of course, of course," he cried, drawing her gently to his side. "My own dear little girl! Why, Emmy, you are the cool-headed man of business to-day, and I am only the child."

"That dreadful letter upset you, papa, and no wonder," said Emmy, modestly parrying the compliment, though not at all insensible to it. "But you see now, let the worst come to the worst, we have nothing to be afraid of. And perhaps the worst may not come to the worst either; perhaps you are not liable for any thing, perhaps it is all a mistake together—who knows?"

Austin shook his head gloomily; he just understood enough of business not to see his way clearly to the adoption of this pleasant theory.

"Well, upon my word, I shouldn't wonder," cried Emmy, who had too good a conceit of her own judgment to be easily put down.

"I don't see how it can be law that you should be robbed like that, and when you go to Mr. Fris-

by, I shan't be a bit surprised if he tells you the same."

"Frisby!" shouted Austin fiercely, and the name seemed to be a more effectual restorative than any thing that had gone before. "Frisby! and do you think I am ever going near him again—that damned infernal villain who talked me over into putting my money in this vile swindle?"

"Did he really, papa?" said Emmy, who from what she had at different times heard had always been under the impression that it was her father who had talked over Mr. Frisby into admitting him to a valuable secret, "did he really? Then he is a wicked, cheating creature who deserves any name you can give him—if it is true what this letter says, at least—and it will just serve him right to lose all your custom when you are rich again. But—"

"Yes, he will be sorry then—confound him, he will be sorry then," muttered Austin, and ground his teeth in vindictive triumph.

"But I can't believe it is true, papa; I can't believe but what if you just go and show him that letter— You must show it to somebody, you know, so perhaps you had better try him first."

Austin was silent for an instant. Yes, certainly so far Emmy was right—he must show that letter to somebody; he must consult with some professional adviser on the amount of his liability and the mode of meeting it, and that without delay. And who, save Frisby, was there to consult?

"I will go and see about it then. And if it turns out true, if it does— Damn the fellow, I'll tell him what I think of him!" he concluded, springing to his feet.

And so reviving was the idea of speaking his mind to his betrayer, if indeed he had been betrayed, that, without further time required for considering his purpose or steadying his nerves, he took leave of his wife and daughter and straightway started for Mr. Frisby's, with a fiery energy of demeanor which showed that for the present at least anger had galvanized him into new life.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### WORSE AND WORSE.

WHETHER or not this anger was altogether wholesome for him, Austin's visit to Mr. Frisby did not serve in any degree to allay it. He was kept waiting a long time without seeing any body but a clerk, who told him his master was particularly engaged just then with a client; and when at last his persistence was rewarded by a sight of the lawyer himself, he did not learn any thing satisfactory. Probably this was not the fault of Mr. Frisby, but rather of facts which were too strong for him, for nothing could have exceeded the urbanity of that gentleman's expressions of regret and surprise on hearing what had happened. Still, urbanity notwithstanding, it did not seem that he had any thing to recommend or suggest, or even any consolation to offer beyond shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head, and saying he was very sorry.

"What! you mean to tell me I have nothing to do but to stand still and be robbed of more



than a hundred thousand pounds?" said Austin, trembling, but as much with wrath as consternation.

"I am very sorry," said Mr. Frisby, rubbing his hands obsequiously, almost as though going through a form of washing them, "very sorry indeed; but I really do not see what else— You had upward of eleven hundred shares, if you recollect—eleven hundred and sixty I think was the exact number; and as you only paid a fifth part of the price down, it follows, of course, that if application for the residue is now made— A most unforeseen circumstance, I am sure, and regretted by no one more than myself."

"Silence, blackguard!" thundered Austin, and brought down his hand on the table in a paroxysm of rage which he could no longer bridle.

"Eh?" said Mr. Frisby, starting in innocent surprise. "Who were you alluding to, sir?"

"To the greatest villain unhung," retorted Austin furiously, and advanced his first so near the lawyer's face that there could no longer exist any doubt as to whom his words were intended for. "Scoundrel! you have done your best to ruin me, and it is not your fault if you have not succeeded."

Mr. Frisby retreated a few steps, looking very pale, but still retaining sufficient presence of mind to smile feebly as though in half-compassionate deprecation.

"If I were what you take me for, Mr. Waters," he said in rather a faint voice, "you could hardly address such language to me with impunity. But I know how to make allowances for mental suffering, and I will not take advantage of actionable violence into which you have been betrayed in a moment of weakness. I am sorry for you, sir, and therefore I can bear a great deal."

But Austin did not hear; perhaps it was as well that he did not, or he might have been tempted to make practical experiment of how much Mr. Frisby really could bear. He had already moved towards the door, and now, while he paused to open it, turned round to say:

"You are a liar and swindler and vagabond; and if I should be as rich as Croesus, not a brass farthing of my money shall ever find its way again into your pocket."

And, with this parting denunciation, he dashed out of the office, somewhat relieved by the thought of what he had said, but still fuming with passion to which no mere words could have given adequate vent.

His passion was so far useful that it served temporarily to stave off reflections which must otherwise have made that day a great deal darker to him than it was. He returned home far from despondent, and inclined rather to inveigh against Frisby than to brood on his own misfortunes. This comparatively sanguine mood continued even after his first anger had begun to cool—kept up partly by the cheering influence of Emmy's representations, partly, perhaps, by one or two visits which he found it necessary to pay to a certain cupboard in his library of which mention has been already made. Be this as it may, when he went to bed that night he had hardly given a serious thought to any difficulties that might be awaiting him in the future.

But with the earliest moment of waking next morning, the inevitable reaction set in. The idea of the sum of money which he would have

to make good was the first that presented itself with returning consciousness, and, in the absence of any strong counter-excitement, it seemed to crush him to the very earth. All elasticity both of body and mind was gone; he had not energy even to complain or bewail himself. As a matter of habit, he rose at the usual hour, and somehow or other got through the task of dressing; but when he entered the breakfast-room, it was with a worn, listless, half-abstracted air, which made his wife and daughter greet him in mournful silence, instinctively feeling that nothing they could say would do him good.

A heap of letters was awaiting him—so many that, if any trace of his usual sanguineness had been left, he would surely have hoped that one among them might contain something either to contradict the news of yesterday, or at least to modify its import. But no such hope occurred to him—no definite expectation indeed of any kind; and as he mechanically sat down to open his letters, it was with an utter want of interest in their contents.

The first which chanced to come to hand was not of a sort to lighten the oppression that weighed so heavily on his spirits. It was from Mr. Tovey, and began by stating with how much regret the writer had learned the calamity that had fallen on the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, in which undertaking he remembered to have heard Mr. Waters speak of being more or less interested. As he had the pen in his hand, it would not perhaps be considered out of place if he took this opportunity of asking Mr. Waters what were his views with regard to the prosecution of the works at Beacon Bay and Chorcombe Lodge, and whether they were to be continued on the same scale as heretofore, and at the same rate of progress. He regretted that he had not yet had time to prepare an exact report of the expenses incurred since Mr. Waters's last cash instalment, but they certainly were not less than eight thousand pounds; and as a very expensive stage was now being reached, he feared it would be requisite to ask Mr. Waters for immediate payment before the works could be proceeded with. He would forward an account, with full particulars, next day; but in the mean time, knowing Mr. Waters's anxiety that no avoidable delay should arise, had ventured to trouble him with this statement of what would at the least be necessary to defray expenses already incurred. An immediate answer would much oblige.

On reading this epistle, Austin's countenance grew, if possible, a shade blanker even than before. He made, however, no spoken comment, merely pushing the letter wearily across the table to his wife and daughter, and with slow automatic motion putting out his hand for the next. Perhaps he had a sort of idea now what that morning's voluminous correspondence might be about.

If he did make any guess on the subject, it was only too correct. Some of the letters he next opened began, like Mr. Tovey's, with a few words of respectful condolence on the now publicly announced collapse of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan; others, more astutely if not more delicately, ignored the topic altogether; but the burden of one and all was practically the same. First Mr.

D'Almayne, being in immediate want of funds without which he would be unable to execute a very costly commission just received, was compelled to ask Mr. Waters for the purchase-money of the valuable pictures the acquisition of which had, according to his wish, been made for the gallery at Chorcombe Lodge. Next, the carriage-builder, who had supplied the magnificent equipage so dear to Emmy's heart, had a large amount to make up, which unfortunately left him no choice but to trouble Mr. Waters with his little account; and then the upholsterer, who had received the order for the furnishing of the new house, thought it might be satisfactory to Mr. Waters to possess a memorandum of the outlay already made in furtherance of his views; while Mr. Jupp, the house-agent, suddenly found the owners of the Laurels pressing for the payment of the last half-year's rent. There were two or three other applications which it is not necessary to specify, but the upshot was, that Austin found himself called upon for sums the gross amount of which would wholly exhaust the balance of property left him by the failure of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan; and he knew that even these were far from representing all the demands which might be made on him. He read and laid down the last of the letters, still uttering no word, and then sat staring before him with a stolid fixity of gaze that spoke of something like despair.

There was silence among the family group for some time, broken at last by Emmy.

"Don't vex about it too much, papa dear. Beacon Bay will make it all right again in time, you know."

But things had come to such a pass with him that even the idea of Beacon Bay failed to bring comfort. He turned his eyes slowly towards the speaker, asking:

"And how am I to keep Beacon Bay if I owe already more than I am worth?"

Emmy made no answer; she knew not, in truth, what answer to make, this being a view of the case which had not yet occurred to her. Austin waited as though half expecting counsel, then, finding that she had none to give, let his head droop forward on his breast, and all was again silence.

The silence this time lasted longer than before, wife and daughter both fearing to make matters worse by futile attempts at consolation, and besides, he was evidently meditating. At length the fruit of his meditation disclosed itself, and, looking furtively from one to the other as if almost afraid of the effect of his own words, he said, in very low depressed accents, which, however, it manifestly cost him an effort to bring out at all:

"Suppose I were to go and speak to Podmore?"

"Oh! do, Austin, do," entreated Mrs. Waters, who would have made this very proposal long ago had she dared, and, save for the utter breakdown of spirit which it indicated, could have wished nothing better than that it should come from her husband himself.

"Mr. Podmore!" ejaculated Emmy in amazement; but an instant's reflection served to show her too that no wiser course could be adopted, and she joined her influence to that of her mother in recommending it.

Thus urged, Austin languidly gathered his let-

ters together, and, putting them into his pocket as part of the case to be consulted on, prepared to betake himself to Mr. Podmore's, setting out, however, with a slow lagging step, as different as possible from that with which he had started yesterday for Mr. Frisby's.

Poor Mrs. Waters and Emmy, left alone, spent a very miserable morning. It has been shown that they both had their private troubles quite apart from Austin's, but this made them only the less able to bear the anxiety which they could not but feel at sight of his bodily and mental suffering, to say nothing of their own threatened reverse of fortune. They spoke little to each other on this new subject of uneasiness, or indeed on any other, but sat waiting for what news the husband and father might bring back, in a suspense which increased with every half-hour of his absence. If he did not find some promise of hope and assistance where he had now gone to seek for it, what would become of them? Above all, what would become of him?

They had been sitting thus a long time, very dejectedly and drearily, when all at once a ring was heard at the visitors' bell which made both look up in some surprise, while to Emmy it caused a strange thrill of excited expectation. Who could it be? Her father was wont to re-enter the house by a back way, without ringing at all, and the weather was damp and foggy—by no means such as would be chosen by any caller not bound on special business. Was it, then, he at last?—brought in haste to her side by the news of the family misfortune—risen perhaps from a sick-bed to give her the comfort and support she so much needed? Ah! if it was—if it really was! When, on the opening of the house door, she heard the sound of manly footsteps in the hall, she felt actually afraid of looking up, lest, after all she had gone through, the excitement of seeing him enter should be more than she could bear.

Still, without looking up, she heard the footsteps draw nearer and nearer. They paused close outside the room; there was a sound as of the turning of a handle, and then through the tumult of her senses she heard the announcement:

"Mr. and Mrs. Elkins."

Poor Emmy! it was as though a bucketful of cold water had been dashed over her.

The new-comers could hardly have failed to gather from their reception that the shadow of some great calamity rested on the household, even if no reports of it had already reached them. Mrs. Waters was pale and care-worn, and went forward to meet them with a listless mournfulness of manner which she could not even attempt to conceal, while Emmy murmured a few inaudible words of greeting with a half-startled, half-vacant air, as though she did not very well know where she was or what she was doing. But Mr. and Mrs. Elkins were much too polite to appear to observe these symptoms, and went through the regular forms of salutation as if nothing had happened; then, still as if nothing had happened, sat down and launched into decorous small-talk about the weather.

When this subject was exhausted—and, Mrs. Waters and Emmy only answering in monosyllables, it could not be made to hold out very long—Mr. Elkins, after one or two gentle preliminary

hems, looked round the room, and, with a slight appearance of embarrassment, remarked:

"Mr. Waters is out just now, I think the servant said?"

"He has gone to Mr. Podmore's," answered Mrs. Waters in subdued tones. "He is in great trouble to-day—about the failure of this company, you know."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Elkins with an assumption of surprise, but immediately afterwards, feeling perhaps that it was impossible to ignore the subject longer, however much he might have liked, for reasons of his own, to do so, he dropped the surprise, and went on sympathizingly: "Ah, yes! I heard something about it—most deeply concerned, I am sure. But I would fain trust that the accounts are very greatly exaggerated?"

"I don't know—I hope so," sadly responded Mrs. Waters. "My poor husband is very anxious."

"I am extremely sorry for it," said Mr. Elkins with extra solemnity—intended perhaps to carry off a certain awkwardness of which he was conscious.

"And so am I—extremely," chimed in Mrs. Elkins, adjusting her bonnet-strings. "But Mr. Waters knows in what quarter to look for consolation, and he will not fail, I hope, to turn to it."

"That is the great point," said Mr. Elkins, feeling himself professionally called upon to put in something.

"We must look upon these trials as sent for our good, and learn to rejoice over them," rejoined Mrs. Elkins with unction. "What are worldly riches but a snare, and what, then, is their loss down to the uttermost farthing—"

"But it is not so bad as that by any means," said Emmy, looking up hastily, for this sympathy was more than she could bear. "Papa may be a little inconvenienced for a time until the railway is made, but that will be all, I am sure."

"Really! I am most truly glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Elkins fervently, forgetting perhaps what she had said about the snare.

"Most truly glad indeed," echoed her husband.

He shifted uneasily on his chair, and paused a little while, as though he would have liked somebody else to follow up the conversation, but every one kept silence, and, with another clearing of his throat, he went on:

"My object in calling—one of my objects, at least—was to hand Mr. Waters a little account which has just been sent in to me. The memorial window, you know; if you remember, Mr. Waters undertook to make up whatever amount might be left underfrayed by public subscription, and of course I am obliged to present him with the bill as soon as I have received it—especially as the people seem to say they are rather pressed for money. Three hundred pounds is the amount, you will perceive—all strictly within the estimate—so that, deducting the five pounds which I succeeded in raising in the shape of subscriptions, that will only leave two hundred and ninety-five pounds to trouble Mr. Waters for. Perhaps you will kindly mention it to him on his return—I shall be so very much obliged to you."

He handed Mrs. Waters a folded paper, which she received with trembling fingers, promising that it should be attended to.

"The window has been wonderfully admired,"

said Mr. Elkins, with something that sounded almost like apology in his tones. "It is quite surprising how many strangers speak to me about it, and wish to know who put it up."

But Mrs. Waters made no reply, so Mr. Elkins did not enlarge further on the subject, and sat for a time in awkward silence, casting about for something else to talk of. He felt that it would not look quite the thing to go away at once.

"Pray have you seen any thing of Miss Egerton lately?" asked Mrs. Elkins, coming to her husband's assistance.

"Miss Egerton!" stammered Mrs. Waters, shrinking with pain at the memories which the name suggested. "N—no, not for some time."

"I know she keeps herself very much to herself just now," said Mrs. Elkins, "but I thought perhaps she might have made an exception with intimate friends like you."

"I have not seen her for some time," reiterated Mrs. Waters tremulously. She would have given any thing to change the subject, but knew not how.

"Not since the breaking off of her engagement, then?"

"No."

"How very odd she is, to be sure!" commented Mrs. Elkins mincingly. "One would have thought that however much she might wish just for the present to keep out of the way of strangers, she would have made a point of explaining matters to a few intimate friends, or at least to some one person in a position of authority—her clergyman, for instance. What can she expect people to think of such conduct—engaging herself to a man and then quarrelling with him, and never a word of explanation! And even Mrs. Waddilove knows no more about it than any body else—I saw her the other day, and she declared she knew nothing except that Miss Egerton had told her the marriage was broken off, and that she never wished to hear Mr. Graham's name again. Now, without any wish to pry into any body's private affairs, I say people have no right to make these mysteries."

"Miss Egerton was always rather eccentric," said Mr. Elkins, palliatively.

"Oh! of course," assented his wife, "every one knows that. Indeed it was a most eccentric proceeding altogether, her engaging herself to this Mr. Graham—a man who seemed to have dropped from the clouds, one may say. Though, by-the-way, I think we heard at the time that you and Mr. Waters knew something of him?"

"Something—oh yes!" Mrs. Waters just found strength to reply.

"But not enough, I suppose, for him to say any thing to you about the reasons of the quarrel—and to be sure, he left the place so suddenly, there was no time. You have not heard any thing from him since, have you?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Waters; and there was a deadly sinking within her as she made the answer.

"It is altogether the strangest affair," resumed Mrs. Elkins. "It seems he went away in such a hurry that he left all his things behind him at the Brown Bear, and a day or two ago I heard that he had not even sent for them yet. So that it almost looks as if he intended to come back again, you know."

"You think so?" and the sister felt something like a ray of comfort enter her soul on finding that the apprehension by which she was tormented had not even suggested itself to others. But immediately afterwards she remembered that others had not seen her brother as she had seen him on his way from Egerton House, and did not know as she knew what reason he had for despair.

As she meditated on these things, she was so visibly moved that visitors less well-bred than Mr. and Mrs. Elkins might probably have been tempted to put in a few sympathizing words on the subject, on which her mind was presumably dwelling, of her husband's losses. But they were very well-bred, and ascribing her agitation entirely to the pecuniary misfortunes which had befallen the family, gave themselves some pains to find something further to say about Miss Egerton and her affairs.

"I wonder how it will all turn out," said Mrs. Elkins presently; and this time, the better to ignore Mrs. Waters's emotion, she addressed herself partly to Emmy, who had been listening to the talk about Mr. Graham with an uneasy, half-remorseful self-consciousness which made her instinctively avoid looking up. "But I suppose the end will be that Miss Egerton will marry her cousin Randal—indeed I fancy there is not much doubt about it now."

There was one instant during which Emmy's heart seemed to stand still with affright, but in the next it was bounding with defiant indignation. How dared people choose such subjects for their idle gossip? How dared that audacious woman talk so confidently of things which she knew and could know nothing about? But she had been so much upset that she could not recover herself in time to reply, and it was Mrs. Waters therefore who answered, with a feeble smile which showed how improbable the suggestion appeared to her:

"I can hardly think that very likely, I must say."

"Oh! but I can assure you it is as good as certain," returned the clergyman's wife with a slight touch of pique. "Mrs. Waddilove says he is at the house nearly every day—the only visitor Miss Egerton sees at all—and we met him ourselves riding down the road yesterday, didn't we, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Elkins, "just outside the park gates."

Emmy did not faint, but there was a darkness before her eyes and a booming in her ears which for the while made every thing external a blank—every thing external, for in the midst of that inner whirl and commotion her thoughts were at work with torturing activity. So he had not been ill, he had not been called away on business—he had been riding about the country, making constant visits in the immediate neighborhood—he had been seen only yesterday—she writhed with pain and shame as she thought of it. It was not therefore because he could not come, but because he would not; he had deliberately deserted her on finding his rich cousin free again—deserted her after those promises, those looks, that tender pressure of the hand. He was a villain then, a treacherous, cowardly, cruel villain—he whom she had trusted so, he of whom she had made such a hero, he to whom she had confided her mother's secret. Ah! that secret—who but

he could have told it? The secret had been told—told almost within the same hour in which he had learned it from her lips; and, knowing of him what she now did, how could she doubt longer? So it had been all her fault, then—her mother's pallid face and wasted frame, her mother's daily and hourly anguish? What had she done? what had she done?

She was at last roused by having to go through the form of saying good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Elkins, who, probably finding it too much for them to keep up a conversation under such adverse circumstances, had now risen to take leave. But burdensome as she had found their presence, their absence brought no relief. She was alone with her mother, and she dared not look her mother in the face. For a moment, indeed, as she heard the long-drawn sigh with which Mrs. Waters returned to her place after the departure of the visitors, she felt an impulse to throw herself into those kind arms which had so often been folded lovingly round her, and make a weeping avowal of her fault. But her fault was so great, and its consequences so dire, that she shrank from confessing it for very shame; she could not find courage in sight of her mother's wretchedness to go up and accuse herself as its cause. And then there was just the possibility that she might not have been the cause, after all. If she could but think so! She rose abruptly with some muttered excuse, and hurried from the room.

Oh, the fool that she had been—the weak, wicked fool! That she should have put her faith in that man, looked up to him and been ready to love him (for she had never really loved him surely)—and all just because he was rich and well-born, and paid her compliments—ah! how she saw through him now! how she saw through her own vanity and folly! And to think that for him she had used John Thwaites so badly, John Thwaites, who had more worth in his little finger than that other one in his whole body—yes, and she had used him badly, very, very badly; she did not understand how she could ever have tried to pretend to herself that she had not. She had asked him for the ribbon, and how could he have done else than return it?—he had acted throughout like the man of honor and spirit and self-respect that he was. He had been too good for her, that was his only fault; and now he had found it out, and she had lost him for ever and ever. Oh! how much evil that man had done her—how much, even if he had not really betrayed her secret. And if he had—if he had—ah! poor mamma—poor dear darling mamma!

And here Emmy fairly gave way, and, throwing herself on her bed—she was safe in her own chamber by this time—sobbed as though her heart would break.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### MRS. WATERS TAKES A RESOLUTION.

MEANWHILE Austin had humbled himself at Mr. Podmore's feet to the very dust. For Mr. Podmore had by no means gone to meet the returning prodigal half way, but had stood firmly on the pedestal of his own dignity, sternly listening to the appeals of his penitent votary, and for a long

time unresponsive to them. At first he would not even understand that Mr. Waters could possibly desire to honor him with a renewal of confidence; and when at length it was definitively explained to him that such was really the case, it was necessary to make the most abject apologies and entreaties before he could see his way to accept the proffered responsibility. But Austin was too desperate to hesitate at any amount of abjectness, and after a while his mingled protestations of contrition for the past and of blind allegiance for the future had the desired effect. Mr. Podmore, through regard, as he said, for the memory of his late client, Mr. Waters's respected uncle, undertook to look into the state of affairs, and to do the best he could.

Even after matters had reached this point, Austin was kept in that office for what looked to him a whole age, fretting and fuming in torturing suspense as to what his fate might be. Mr. Podmore had promised to give an opinion on the facts of the case, but until the facts of the case had been laid before him in the most complete and circumstantial manner he would not allow the faintest glimmer of an opinion to escape him. In vain the anxious client was constantly asking what he thought; Mr. Podmore would not let himself be one whit hurried, and kept on questioning and cross-questioning and noting down answers and reckoning up figures and striking balances till Austin was like to go mad with impatience. And even when at last, having considered and calculated till he could consider and calculate no more, Mr. Podmore threw himself oracularly back in his arm-chair, and began to sum up the results of his deliberation—even then he by no means came to the point at once.

"Of course this case is one susceptible of great modification by circumstances hereafter to transpire, but it appears to me on a *prima facie* view that the facts are these," and here Mr. Podmore made a flourish in the air with a large quill pen as though drawing up an imaginary statement.

"You have incurred liabilities (of no portion of which, I am sorry to say, I can hold out to you any definite prospect of being relieved) which at the most moderate computation must be some thousands of pounds in excess of your assets—that is, as I have explained, your assets taken at their present value, and with due consideration of the greater or less disadvantage of a forced sale."

"And do you mean, then—" stammered Austin, but Mr. Podmore with a majestic wave of his pen reduced him into silence while he went on:

"On the other hand, it is probable that part of the property constituting those assets is of a kind capable of considerable improvement. When the railway is made, the land and building materials at Beacon Bay which now would have to be sold at less than their actual cost—"

"And will they have to be sold, will they?" exclaimed Austin in terror. "That's just what I am afraid of, and yet it would be so infamously unjust, nobody surely— What! for the sake of a few trumpery thousands to take away property that in a year or two will be worth millions— Why, what are you looking at me in that way for? you know you said yourself—"

"I said the property is probably capable of

considerable improvement," returned Mr. Podmore with a shrug of the shoulders, "and I say so still. And supposing you are able to retain it, I believe it offers you a very fair chance of ultimately securing a moderate competency."

"A competency, Mr. Podmore! Why—"

"And for that reason," continued the lawyer, once more waving him into silence, "for that reason I am of opinion that its retention ought to be the great object of your endeavors at the present moment. The only question is"—and here Mr. Podmore made a lunge with his pen as though probing space for an answer—"How far will those endeavors be successful?"

This was just the question which Austin wanted to get solved, and, finding that the oracle had not yet gone farther than propounding it, he could only look blankly before him in mute despondency.

Mr. Podmore went on, but not so much by way of answering the question as of reducing it to a point.

"I do not think I can hold out any hope that you will be enabled to raise money by loan on the security of the estate or otherwise. It appears from what you say that half the purchase money of the property is still standing over on mortgage, and such being the case, you would hardly be able to obtain any further sum except at a rate of interest which would equally have the effect of breaking down your resources. So that evidently all hope from that quarter must be abandoned."

Austin still said nothing, only raised his eyes to Mr. Podmore's face in helpless entreaty. He could refute none of the lawyer's arguments, and yet they seemed to point straight to despair.

Mr. Podmore paused a few seconds, so as to give his client full time to realize the situation, then resumed, bringing the finger-tips of his two hands lightly together:

"The only course which I can suggest is that I, as your legal adviser and representative, should endeavor to induce some or all of the creditors to allow a portion of their claims to stand over for two or three years at a due rate of interest. Such an arrangement seems to afford them a chance which they might not otherwise possess of the satisfaction in full of their demands, while for you it would obtain the time requisite for the partial retrieving of your position by the improvement of the Beacon Bay estate."

The light returned to Austin's eyes as he listened; he saw an opening in the clouds just when he had least expected it.

"Of course, of course," he cried feverishly, "the very thing. Only get them to wait a little, and it will be all right—time is all I want. And they will give it me, won't they? for their own sakes they will be sure to give it me."

"On that point I can not undertake to pronounce a positive opinion," said Mr. Podmore, joining and disjoining his finger-tips with slow measured beat. "It all turns on whether I shall be able to convince them that waiting will be for their own interest. But I do not conceal from you that, as the success of such an application depends in some degree on the character of the solicitor who makes it, and the confidence inspired by his personal assertion, you have one point—well, it does not become me to say exactly of advantage—"

"Oh yes! I have, indeed I have, and shall never be able to thank you enough for it. Yes, there can be no doubt, can there?—when one thinks of that, you know. Oh! you are certain to succeed, quite certain."

"I think it may not be altogether impossible," replied Mr. Podmore with modest dignity.

"Oh! the thing is as sure as any thing. Why then, and so every thing will come right, after all. The railway is to be open in two years, and then all this will be as though it had never been."

"Your losses will then probably be in a considerable measure repaired," said Mr. Podmore, shrugging his shoulders again. "But an accession of unlimited wealth such as you appear to contemplate, I could not conscientiously lead you to look forward to."

"Not for the first year or two after the opening, perhaps. But afterwards—why, it stands to reason. All the sea-frontage is mine for half a mile, you know, and when once the place becomes a great port—"

"Ah yes! when," interrupted Mr. Podmore, somewhat curtly. "Mr. Waters, it has been your mistake all along to be too sanguine, and I must not encourage you in it."

"But there is such a thing as not being sanguine enough," said Austin eagerly, "and that is a mistake too sometimes. And you recollect, Mr. Podmore, you always thought the railway would not be made at all, didn't you now?"

Mr. Podmore got suddenly rather red in the face, and drew himself up so stiffly that Austin with some consternation knew at once that he was offended.

"I am quite aware, Mr. Waters, that such was the impression on my mind. And I do not hesitate to say that I am still of opinion that, had the Directors understood their own and the Company's interests, the line would not have been decided on. The expense of constructing even so short a branch through such a hilly district will be very great, and it is three years since the ordinary shareholders of the Company received a farthing of dividend. But on your account I sincerely rejoice that the Directors have taken a different view of the case."

It was as much as Austin could do to contain his impatience while Mr. Podmore enunciated an argument in his estimation so utterly short-sighted and obsolete. But he saw that the lawyer was disposed to be irritable on the subject, and, remembering how much depended on keeping him in good humor at this juncture, he did not carry the controversy farther. After all, it was only natural for a man in Mr. Podmore's place, having been once wrong, to wish to let himself down as easily as possible.

"I ought to be very much obliged to you for your kind expressions, Mr. Podmore," he said humbly. "And I hope you know that any little difference of opinion which might be between us on a matter like that doesn't in the least affect my gratitude, or diminish my respect for your judgment."

Mr. Podmore bowed, still however rather stiffly, and Austin, afraid that he might have been a little too patronizing, went on more humbly still:

"I look on you in the light of a preserver and deliverer, and always should, if I were to live a

thousand years. You have saved me and my poor family from ruin, and I will bless you forever."

"I will do my best for you, and that is all I can say," returned Mr. Podmore, more graciously this time. "But you must remember that nothing has been done yet."

"Oh! but I am not afraid; when a man like you takes a thing in hand, it is as good as done already. A little time is all I want; and when it is known that you are acting for me—a person so universally respected and looked up to—"

"I should not wonder but that I may be able to do something," said Mr. Podmore with increasing urbanity. "And now perhaps—" here he looked at his watch—"as the case is one in which some step ought to be taken with as little delay as possible, and I am pressed with a great many other matters—"

"Ah yes! to be sure, your valuable time—I beg your pardon for trespassing so long," said Austin, rising in great haste. He had never been hurried out of that office in former times, but it did not occur to him to feel aggrieved; hardly any thing could have made him feel aggrieved with Mr. Podmore to-day. For though there might have been a little instinctive flattery in what he had said just now, he did most genuinely regard Mr. Podmore as a benefactor who had snatched him as a brand from the burning. "Good-afternoon; and I'm sure if you had any idea how truly grateful—"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Waters," said the lawyer blandly, but still perhaps rather edging him out of the room. "You may rely on my doing my utmost to secure your interests."

He called a clerk to open the door, and Austin, with a few more mumbled words of thanks, went out and took the way towards home.

The load that had lifted itself off his mind since he had passed along that same road in the morning!—so heavy it had been that now, relieved from it, he felt almost jubilant. So there was hope for him yet; he had lost much, but the means of self-recovery were to be left—at least Mr. Podmore had promised to endeavor that they should be left, and Mr. Podmore would have made no such promise without good expectation of succeeding. And if, as was almost certain, Mr. Podmore did succeed, if Beacon Bay could be but saved, why, then there were all things possible. The property would improve, the lawyer himself admitted that—improve so much as to pay off all debts and yield a sufficiency on which to live comfortably into the bargain. And Mr. Podmore was so morbidly cautious, so absurdly particular to be within the mark, such an admission from him meant a great deal more than appeared on the surface. Besides, he had a direct interest in depreciating the value of the Beacon Bay investment; he had committed himself against it at first, and now would naturally make the least of its advantages that he could—the wonder was that he had allowed so much. It was evident that he must think the capabilities of the property much greater than he acknowledged; and if he thought so, with his dull lymphatic temperament, what must they be in reality! Surely, then, while Beacon Bay was retained, it could not be said that any thing was lost. The debts would be paid off in a couple of years, on the

opening of the railway; in another year the money lost by the Anglo-Cosmopolitan would be made up; and in a year after that the further development of Waterston would constitute its proprietor the richest man in the county.

Sustaining himself with these and similar arguments, he reached home, if not exactly in good spirits, at least in a state of nervous excitement which might be mistaken for good spirits, and went straight to the room where he had left his wife and daughter.

Emmy was no longer there, but Mrs. Waters was still sitting much as she had been ever since the Elkinsons went away, with her chin resting disconsolately on her hand, and her eyes fixed on the fire in dreary contemplation. As her husband entered, she looked up, and at sight of his face a slight exclamation as of satisfaction escaped her.

"Well, Austin. You are better again?"

"Yes, I have seen Podmore, and he says that all will come right. Beacon Bay will make every thing up."

"I am very glad to hear it, dear," said Mrs. Waters, to whom indeed the news for her husband's sake brought inexpressible comfort. For if ruin had really come, how would he have borne it?

"I knew you would be. Yes, Podmore is going to see me through—he will get the creditors to wait a year or two, and then, as he says himself, Beacon Bay will make it all right again. And if Podmore says so, you may know what to think."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Mrs. Waters again, but rather more absently this time. Now that her mind was relieved from present anxiety on her husband's account, another consideration had occurred to her which hardly left her any attention to give to what he was saying, and with a sigh she turned her eyes once more towards the fire.

"Yes," continued Austin, "I always knew there was a gold mine in that property, and if I didn't know it before, I should know it now; Podmore wouldn't say as much without having good reason, you may depend. So cheer up; all's well that ends well, eh?"

There was a tone almost of gleefulness in his voice that jarred on the wife very painfully. She tried to answer, but could not, only brought forth yet another sigh.

"Why, Agnes, what's the matter? you don't congratulate me half. I really think you might try."

"I can't help it," she pleaded, hastily wiping her eyes. "I was thinking—"

"Thinking of what?" he asked angrily, finding that she had come to an abrupt stop.

"Of Harry," she answered reluctantly, and then burst into tears.

He turned suddenly pale and cold as death.

"What of him? has he come back? has he told? My God! if he has—"

"Oh no! it is not that; how can you think it? But I am afraid, I am afraid—he has been so long without writing, and he looked so ill—Oh! Austin, when I think of it, I am miserable."

She wept convulsively, obliged at last to give full way to the grief which in her husband's presence she had so long struggled to conceal.

Meanwhile he stood by silently and looked on, with evident concern for her distress, and yet, in the midst of his concern, visibly regaining composure.

"Then what do you suppose can have happened to him?" he asked presently.

"I don't know, but sometimes I think— You have no idea how he looked—like a man half dead already—he may have been taken ill perhaps, and with nobody near to nurse him. Or perhaps—he was desperate at the time, and a desperate man has so many ways—and yet I can't believe that either; it is too dreadful. But if he is living, why does he make me suffer so?"

She raised her voice at the last words, as though making frantic appeal for an answer. But for some time no answer came, Austin remaining wrapped in meditation. So deep was his meditation, and so different was his train of thought from that which his wife's anguish seemed calculated to suggest, that, as he shook himself at last out of his reverie, he drew something not unlike a breath of relief.

"I am very sorry, I'm sure," he said, bringing his eyes slowly back upon her. "But you will make yourself ill if you vex about it so. And you may be mistaken, after all, you know."

She shook her head despairingly.

"If I could but think so! But why does he not write?"

"It is very strange, certainly," admitted Austin, and there was an unwonted sparkle in his eyes as though from some suppressed excitement. "But we can be sure of nothing yet; he may be on his way back to India perhaps. Only wait patiently a little longer."

"Wait—wait—you all tell me to wait. Yes, I must wait, I must, and yet how I do not know. Oh! Austin, don't think me unreasonable—I could be very patient if only I could fancy it was as you say; let me have the slightest proof, and I could wait contentedly for months. And is that really what you think—that he is on his way back to India?"

"It is quite possible," said Austin, with no very great emphasis, however. "There are plenty of things that may have kept him from writing; he may have had to leave in a great hurry perhaps, in some vessel just starting. Oh yes! it is quite possible."

"If it really was so!" she cried with flushing cheeks—"if really— But how can I be sure? To have to wait weeks and weeks more without knowing—how am I to bear it?" and she clasped her hands in a kind of terror at the prospect. "Oh! Austin, could you not try to find out for me? If he has left the country there must be some way of getting to know it, surely—indeed, wherever he may have gone— Try to find out, dear Austin, try; ask some one—"

"You don't understand what you are talking about," interrupted her husband rather peevishly.

"What! would you have every body in the place know that we are inquiring about him? What would they think? And besides, who is there to ask? how could we set about it?"

She saw the difficulty, and bowed her head in despairing resignation.

"There, don't grieve about it, Agnes," he resumed more kindly; "you will only make yourself ill, and do no good. We must just hope for

the best and think of it as little as possible; that is what I try to do, and of course, if there was any thing wrong, I should be as sorry as any body—of course I should."

She made a feeble gesture of assent, and said nothing. The paroxysm of grief and anxiety which had first led to the mention of her brother's name had somewhat cooled down, and the old instinctive feeling that on this subject her husband and herself were out of sympathy began to resume its sway. She hardly knew how it was, but she did not wish to say more to him of her fears, or even to receive his attempted consolation.

Perhaps Austin, on his side, rather desired to bring the conversation to an end also. At all events, on finding that she did not seem inclined to follow it up, he was quite ready to acquiesce.

"I think I had better go and see after a few things I have got to do before dinner—papers and so on to look out for Podmore; so if you don't mind—but indeed I dare say you'll be more comfortable alone. I am sorry you should be so anxious, poor dear Agnes: not but what I'm just as anxious too, of course—but fretting can be of no earthly use, and you see how many other things there are to attend to. There, good-bye, and try not to think any more about it."

She answered something that sounded like a promise to obey, but it was probably made more to avoid prolonging the discussion than any thing else; for no sooner did she find herself alone than, instead of acting on Austin's injunction to endeavor to think no more of the subject, she fell to musing on it so profoundly that she could think of nothing else.

A new idea had been suggested by that conversation with her husband—or rather an old one had presented itself with greater force than formerly. Could not an attempt be made to discover something as to her brother's whereabouts and what had become of him? Might it not at least be possible to find out whether he had been bound on the day of that ill-omened journey? If only the faintest clue was to be obtained, she would grudge no trouble in following it up; she was ready to travel hundreds of miles, if by so doing she could obtain definite news either of his hurried departure from the country (ah! if only she could hope to find it thus!), or—of whatever else might have happened. As she thought of the exertions she might make if she had the slightest thread to guide her, she chafed so feverishly under her forced inactivity that she felt as though she could not bear it longer.

But what was she to do? As her husband had said, who was there to ask? How was the thing to be set about? If she inquired about Mr. Graham too particularly, there was the danger of making people suspect in what relation he stood to her, and for her brother's sake she shrank from the betrayal of his identity almost as much as Austin himself did. Then it was very doubtful whether any body in Chorcombe really knew more than herself. He was not likely to have spoken to any stranger of his intentions, and no ticket-clerk or railway-porter could be expected to remember what had been the destination of an unknown traveller nearly three weeks ago.

There was indeed one person in Chorcombe who was not a stranger to him, a person with whom he had had a long interview within an hour

of his departure. Was it possible that he might have said something to Miss Egerton of his plans? But no, it was not likely that in his desperation he would have found any thing to say about the future; it was not likely even that he had so much as bestowed a thought on it. And then how could she face Miss Egerton, after the scene that had passed between them at their last meeting?

Ah! but for her brother's sake she was strong enough to face any body or any thing, if only she could hope to find something to relieve this cruel suspense. And Miss Egerton, however cold or haughty she might be, would certainly tell all that she knew, could not refuse a plain answer to a plain question. Besides, being the only person in Chorcombe who was informed of Harold Maxwell's return to England under a feigned name, Miss Egerton was also the only person of whom inquiries might be made without danger of disgracing him yet further. It could do no harm, then, to ask her; the only question was, could it do good? Well, there was a chance, surely. It was from her house that he had gone forth on his journey that dreadful day, and it was at least possible that he might have let fall something concerning his destination—the merest word, perhaps, but still something which might be found a clue. And yet it was so very improbable that he had said any thing, and the visit would be so painful—

Thus for a long time Mrs. Waters sat pondering and wavering, sometimes half resolved to go to Egerton House without an hour's loss of time, sometimes shrinking from the project as involving only a useless sacrifice of feeling. But the idea, as often as it was put away, returned again on a review of the circumstances of the case, and in greater force than ever. It was not that the scheme appeared in itself more promising as she considered it, but that there was absolutely nothing else which she could do. She must either try the effect of applying to Miss Egerton, or sit still and wait as she had waited heretofore.

But the prospect of waiting was intolerable. She had therefore only the other alternative left, and ultimately she determined to adopt it. When at last she quitted that room to rejoin her husband and daughter, it was with a firm resolution, kept, however, rigorously to herself, that if another morning came and brought no tidings, she would take her way to Miss Egerton's without further delay.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### RANDAL SCORES A POINT.

It was not true that a marriage between Olivia and her cousin Randal was as good as settled—so far rumor was wrong. But it was true that Randal had been of late a very frequent if not daily visitor at Egerton House; so far rumor was quite right.

In the bitterness of her despair and shame at discovering what manner of man it was on whom she had prodigally poured forth all the love of her nature, Olivia would have liked to shut herself up from sight of all the world with no single exception. But she could not exclude from her presence one who was not merely her own near relation, but, moreover, the person to whose vigil-



ance she was indebted for deliverance from the snare into which she had already fallen. So when Randal presented himself, first to beg her pardon for the revelation he had been obliged to make, then, next day, to inquire after her health, then, a day or two after that, to inquire again, then, on the morrow, because he happened to be passing, and could not find himself so near without looking in, then, in a day or two more, to ask for the loan of a book which he believed to be in the Egerton House library—when he thus perpetually kept on calling on one pretext or another, she always forced herself to see him, and even to make him welcome.

And then it was not only that she knew him to have a claim on her which she was in propriety and justice bound to recognize; she felt genuinely grateful for what she could not but regard as his generosity in concealing from others the discovery which it overwhelmed her with humiliation even to think upon, genuinely grateful for the personal interest in her which his visits implied, and which, even when she found this expression of it most irksome, was not without a soothing influence on her wounded self-respect. She despised and hated herself so much for her own past weakness that it was quite a relief to find it condoned by the continued friendship of one who, besides knowing all the circumstances of her folly, was also a member of the family on which she had been near bringing the disgrace of alliance with a thief and a forger. In brief, she felt that Randal had a right to censure and condemn her, and that she was indebted to him in proportion as he abstained from using it.

Randal saw the progress he had so rapidly made not only in his cousin's intimacy, but in her liking and esteem, and did not fail to draw from it the most favorable auguries for his ultimate attainment of the object on which he was now more than ever bent. He had too much tact, however, to startle her by any hasty overture; and at the time when, as has been seen, he was set down by the gossips of the countryside almost as her accepted suitor, no word of direct wooing had passed his lips. No word of direct wooing, for he had taken care occasionally to let fall some tender compliment or expression of more than cousinly interest by way of feeling his ground. And, on the whole, he was pleased with the result of these experiments; for though Olivia never encouraged such utterances, and always showed herself in haste to change the subjects which had led to them, she did not put them down, as she had been wont to do, with chilling or biting retorts. It was plain that whatever might be her precise disposition towards him, he had nothing to fear from that old spirit of sarcasm and railery which had once made her so difficult to deal with, and, under these circumstances, he felt emboldened to hope all things.

After a great deal of patient waiting and cautious preparation, he judged at last that the time had come for more decisive action.

"I think you understand me better than you did, Olivia," he said one day when, having made his way to Egerton House as he so often did now, he found her, as he thought, more than usually cordial.

"A great deal better, Randal—oh yes! I understand that you are very kind and generous, and that I have cause to be most deeply grateful.

And I am grateful, you may believe that, whether I say any thing about it or not" (these words were spoken very earnestly). "But you have not told me yet where you are going to spend your Christmas," she added, with a quick relapse into her ordinary tone.

She could have said a great deal more both of her present gratitude and of her remorse for injustice formerly done him, but she had an instinctive feeling that she was on ground more or less dangerous, and, hardly knowing why, preferred to shift it if possible.

She was not allowed to shift it so easily, however, for he went on, taking no notice of her last remark:

"Then, if circumstances are so much changed, you can not blame me for asking again a question I have asked before—asked so often that you might think me impertinent for repeating it if the conditions of the case were not so completely altered. But at least you will not think so badly of me as that, will you, Olivia?"

"You know very well I could not think badly of you," she answered as steadily as she could, yet with an uncomfortable apprehension of what he might have in his mind, which made her long more than ever to turn the conversation into another channel. But not being able to find any thing to say which might have that effect, she proceeded with a kind of desperate courage to demand:

"What question is it?"

"Can you not guess, Olivia?" and he threw a pathos into his voice and look which left no further doubt as to his drift. "A very simple question, and yet one on the answer to which my whole happiness depends. Will you be mine?"

Olivia had had a sort of presentiment that something like this might be coming, and yet she was surprised—so much surprised that for a while she was wholly incapable of making answer. It seemed to her almost incredible that after what had happened he could still seriously wish that she should be his wife—she who by his timely interference had been so lately saved from making herself a public laughing-stock—she whom he knew to have lavished all the love she had to give on a returned felon. The sundry tender expressions that from time to time he had let fall had indeed occasionally suggested to her that there might be some danger of a renewal of his suit, only on reflection the idea had always seemed so preposterous that she preferred to ascribe all unwelcome symptoms to a good-natured desire of applying balm to her lacerated self-esteem. Yet here he was, not paying merely empty compliments, but actually making formal demand for her hand—the hand which only a few weeks ago had been pledged so unworthily that she shrank with pain and shame at the recollection. She could hardly believe her ears.

"Olivia, will you not answer? You are not angry, surely?"

He put out his hand to take hers, but she drew it hastily away.

"Not angry—I have no right, of course; but so much surprised—Please do not say any thing more about it, Randal; it grieves me more than I can express."

She was indeed very much pained by what he had said, and yet, even in speaking, she was con-

scions that in some slight degree she had been gratified too. It was a kind of comfort to find that she had not irredeemably lost caste in the estimation of one who was acquainted with all that was ludicrous and humiliating in her short-lived romance.

"And why should you be grieved? Have you so little regard for me, then?"

"It is just because I have a regard for you that I am grieved. Pray, pray say no more; you know very well that it can never be."

"Why should it never be?" he persisted. "You have some regard for me, you say; then what reason—"

"Yes, regard, but not— Forgive me, Randal, and don't think me ungrateful, for I am not—but you are only paining me and yourself for nothing. I thank you very much, but it is impossible—quite impossible."

He looked at her scrutinizingly, and understood that she was very much in earnest. But he had persevered too long to be willing to give up now.

"Oh, that man!" he exclaimed, with a burst so abrupt as to be almost melodramatic, "the evil he has to answer for! I thought it was over, but it is not; you can not forget him; you try, but you can not. Ah! my poor dear wronged cousin!"

If the words were meant to sting, they answered their end well. Whether it was their tone of implied reproach or their tone of implied compassion that wounded her most, Olivia herself could not have said, but she was wounded to the very quick. That she should be openly accused of the despicable, the degrading weakness of caring for the man still—a weakness against the bare possibility of which she was forever jealously guarding! How dared any body say or think such a thing of her? And yet was it wonderful, knowing as every body did how infatuated she had been once? She had never felt the depth of her humiliation so keenly as she felt it now—never, at least, since the first fatal hour of discovery.

"You are quite mistaken," she said with crimsoning cheeks, and an attempt at her old pride of manner. "I can forget, and I do. Every thing connected with that time is past and done with—every thing." Then, suddenly remembering how ill the affectation of haughtiness became her under present circumstances, she let her head fall forward, and added in a choking voice: "Except the shame, and that will stay with me for ever and ever."

He contemplated her drooping figure for a while in silence, then, drawing his chair a trifle nearer, laid his hand on hers very kindly, not, however, exactly repeating his attempt to take hold of it.

"Why should you be ashamed, Olivia? You made a mistake, but it was merely a mistake of too much goodness and generosity. I am one of the two or three persons in the world that know of it or ever can know of it, and I admire and respect you as much as ever I did. My dear cousin, why should you be ashamed?"

"I have only too good cause," said Olivia sadly. "But it is very kind of you to try to comfort me, I know, and I am grateful, believe me."

And grateful she did indeed feel. For the very reason that she had never been less disposed to be comforted than at the present moment, she

felt the attempt at comforting her to be very delicate and generous.

"Grateful! I detest the word. And as for trying to comfort you, I am only saying what I feel; you ought to know that. But the truth is, your feelings towards me are so different from mine towards you that you can not even give me credit for them."

With this he sighed as deeply as ever he had done in old times when his sighs had been wont to raise all Olivia's ire against him. But somehow her ire was not raised now. It was not that she believed in his professions of love now any more than she had believed in them then; she had never in her life been so little in the mood for imagining herself capable of inspiring a genuine passion. But, feeling as she did real friendship for her cousin, she was inclined to believe that real friendship for herself might be among his motives for seeking a union which doubtless also seemed desirable to him on grounds of self-interest. She could have wished that he had not renewed his suit at all, but she could not impute to him as an offense that, having renewed it, he still pleaded it in conventional suitor's language. On the contrary, she felt that in framing his new addresses so precisely on the model of the old, he showed a disposition to condone and ignore the past which was very considerate.

Randal knew that he had sometimes erred by the over-ardor of his professions, and, finding that no answer was returned, began to fear that he might have done so now.

"I am afraid you are offended, Olivia."

"Offended—oh no!" she answered, with a sharp twinge of remorse at remembering how often she had been offended with him for no greater cause. "After all your kindness—how can you believe it of me? But—"

"There! again you will persist in being grateful—grateful in words, at least. Oh! Olivia, if you think you have really any thing to thank me for, why will you refuse me the one only reward that I care for?"

"Because I can not consent—in justice to yourself I can not. I do not feel towards you as I ought to feel towards you if—if I did as you wish. Forgive me; you understand what I mean."

"You mean that you do not love me?"

"Not in that way. Oh! Randal, why will you pain me so? You know what friendship I feel for you, and if I could feel more than friendship I would. But I can not—I am very sorry, but I can not."

And in saying this Olivia did really, for the first time in her life, regret that she could not bring herself to answer her cousin differently. It was very painful to have to deny what he was so persistent in asking.

"But if I am willing to be content with friendship?" he argued. "I should be only too proud and happy to have your love, I need not say, but it will come afterwards, I am not afraid. As for blind passionate love before marriage being a necessary basis of happiness, that is all romance and delusion."

"Oh! in some cases, certainly," said Olivia; and her lip curled bitterly as she thought what a very unstable basis of happiness her own love had proved. And how blind and passionate that love had been Heaven only knew.

"You really do feel friendship for me, Olivia, do you not?"

"Oh! Randal, of course; how can you ask? But for that very reason—"

"And you esteem me a little, I hope?"

"I esteem you very much indeed; you are every thing that is good and kind and considerate—a thousand times more so than I deserve. But if you would only hear me—"

"Hear me first, Olivia. Friendship and esteem—what more solid guaranties of happiness can be sought for in marriage than these? I suppose you wish, as every body must wish, to be as happy and useful in this world as you can; and if so, how can you do better than marry a man who for years has lived in the hope of winning you, and whom you yourself confess to liking and esteeming?"

Olivia felt rather perplexed by the question. She still shrunk from the conclusion to which her cousin's arguments pointed, and yet she could not deny that the arguments in themselves seemed reasonable enough.

"No, Randal, no; it might suit most people, but not me. I will try to be as happy and useful as I can, but it must be in living by myself. I have had plenty of experience of living by myself, you know; it is only going on as I began."

She attempted a smile here, but, in spite of herself, it was a very faint one. She could not help thinking how very different her future must be from her past—that past which, if it had sometimes been monotonous and lonely, had at least been fraught with such keen enjoyment of the sense of independence and self-reliance. She had held her head so high then, had felt so strong and vigorous and self-confident; and now she was so crushed and broken and ashamed! Ah! the dreary hours that she would have to spend in communion with her own self-reproach—she quailed as she thought of them.

"Going on as you began! And did you not begin by making a great mistake?" asked Randal, after a pause during which he had been intently watching her.

She quite started as she heard; the words were so exact an expression of a doubt which just then had been passing through her own brain that they seemed almost an echo. A mistake—yes, truly she had made a mistake—a mistake in deeming herself strong when she was weak, wise when she was foolish, able to go alone, when but for timely aid she was about plunging into an abyss. A great mistake, no question.

"Silence gives assent—is it not so?" said Randal caressingly; then, as she still did not answer, he drew nearer, and, in his tenderest accents, whispered: "Ah! Olivia, keep silence still, and let it give assent to every thing—to my happiness—to yours. I would make you happy, believe me."

And his arm slipped round her waist as he was speaking.

She roused herself, and pushed his arm away almost rudely.

"No, leave me—I tell you I will not. This is persecution—leave me this moment."

He rose, looking very much humbled—so much humbled that Olivia, remembering the fate from which he had saved her, was seized with dismay at her own ingratitude.

"Forgive me—I did not mean it. I hardly know what I am doing. Forgive me, Randal, for indeed my heart is breaking."

And for the first time in Randal's presence she burst into tears.

He was at her side again in an instant.

"You did not mean it! Then I may still hope! Ah! Olivia, my poor dear Olivia, you will let me have the right of comforting you, will you not?"

She made no answer; she saw that she had put herself at a disadvantage by her precipitation, and she knew not how to repair the error. Besides, she was weeping still, and her tears seemed to have taken away all her energy.

He took hold of her hand, and this time she did not withdraw it; how could she without running the risk of offending him anew? She felt strangely, uncomfortably helpless; was she, then, really doomed to yield at last the consent she had so long withheld? Well, after all, perhaps it might be the wisest course, and it was one against which she had exhausted all her powers of reasoning.

Randal saw his advantage, and did not fail to press it.

"It is settled, Olivia, settled at last. You are mine, and I may call you so."

She felt that the toils were closing round her, and made a desperate effort to keep them from closing quite.

"Not yet, not yet, you must give me time. Let me have a day to think, and I promise that you shall have your answer."

"Let me have my answer now; say yes at once."

"No, I must have time—I must and will. Randal, let me go."

She spoke so firmly, and drew her hand from his with so much decision, that he understood it would be dangerous to urge her too closely for the present.

"You are not trifling with me, Olivia? You are not sending me away to wait when you have made up your mind against me already? I will go, but only tell me that I have a chance."

"You have a chance—there, that is enough. I tell you I must have time."

"You shall have time," he said, and moved towards the door. "Olivia, I can trust you, I am sure. You have told me that I have a chance, and you are not cruel enough to make me hope only to disappoint me. And how am I to know my fate?"

"I will write to you—perhaps to-day. But, remember, nothing is—"

"Oh! nothing is settled, I know; you are free to dash me down into despair after raising me to the highest pinnacle of hope, and I shall have no right to complain. But still I do not think you can be so cruel, I do not. Olivia, I leave you now, and remember, my whole happiness is in your hands."

And before she had time to say another word in deprecation of his implied confidence in her consent, he waved his hand and was gone.

Olivia's first feeling on being left alone was a kind of half-incredulous consternation. Was it possible that she had actually promised to take the idea of marrying Randal Egerton into consideration, actually given him reason to speak as though he made sure beforehand of her acquies-

cence? What had she been doing? That within so short a time of the breaking-off of one engagement (and such a breaking-off too!) she should be seriously contemplating the possibility of entering into another—what could be thought of her? what could she think of herself? She felt more ashamed and abased than she had felt yet.

Her sense of humiliation was so bitter that after a while she began to rebel against it in sheer self-defense. After all, had she so very much reason to be ashamed? had she done any thing which need appear so very disgraceful and contemptible, either in her own estimation or in that of others? No doubt people would think, if they knew, that she had rooted the old love out of her heart very easily; but then, was not this exactly what she would wish them to think? Was it not something to be much more ashamed of that she should be supposed to be languishing for that—that and she shuddered, unable to give him a name even in her own mind—to cherish his memory so that the whole happiness of her after-life was destroyed by him? Ah! surely that was the worst degradation of any which could possibly befall her.

And at this stage she ceased to argue whether she ought or ought not to be ashamed of her undertaking to consider her cousin's suit, and set herself to consider it in good earnest.

Certainly, looking at things from the prudential point of view, the arrangement which he suggested had a great deal to recommend it; nothing, indeed, could seem more eminently judicious, or calculated to promote the welfare of both. In all external circumstances of birth and breeding and position and age, each was thoroughly well suited to the other, while on both sides there was the esteem and friendship which, as he had said—and said, she was sure, with truth—constituted the best guaranties for married happiness. Then, moreover, she was bound to him by the strongest ties of gratitude. His watchful friendship had saved her from a fate so dreadful that she dared not think of it, and to his magnanimity she was further indebted for escaping the observation and ridicule which a public disclosure of the facts must have brought with it. Again, how generous he had been in all his dealings with her, how delicately tender of her feelings, how studiously persistent in ignoring that she had done any thing to forfeit his or her own respect! Ah! how much she owed him, to be sure! more than she could hope ever to repay.

And yet there was one way open to her of repaying something—one only way; she might give him the hand he had so often pleaded for, and, giving it, make him master of Egerton Park. If she had not come between, Egerton Park would have been as good as his already; it was she, and she alone, who had kept him and his all these years out of what would otherwise have been their lawful inheritance, and which they certainly would have graced far more than she had done. Was it not almost her duty to consent to make what restitution lay in her power?

Could it be her duty really, she asked herself with a sinking heart, and, burying her face in her hands, she set about reviewing the arguments on the other side.

But when she tried to allege some reason for deciding against her cousin's wishes, she could

not find it save in her own feelings. She preferred to go on living alone as she had lived hitherto; that was all that she could say.

And with what face could she say so to Randal? She preferred living alone, but had she shown herself fit for self-government? Was she indeed really fit for it—a poor weak, helpless creature, who had fallen into the first snare spread for her? And could she even hope to be tolerably happy, living alone after what had occurred? How could she bear to know that wherever she went people would be canvassing her disappointment, as they would please to call it—whispering among themselves how the rich Miss Egerton was pining in secret for a former lover, and had determined to live and die unmarried for his sake? And that was not all—perhaps *he* might hear of it, and think so too.

She started up as though a red-hot iron had touched her. Ah! but he should not think so—never, never; she would show him and all the world differently; she would do her duty to the man who had saved her—would write that very instant—And with feverish haste she flew to her desk, laid a sheet of paper before her, and sat down, pen in hand.

She had already traced the words, "My dear Randal," and was pausing to consider in what phrase she should signify that all was to be as he wished, when the door was thrown open, and a servant appeared to announce:

"Mrs. Waters."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### ILLUMINATION.

OLIVIA's first impulse on hearing the name was to gather up the paper on which those three words stood inscribed, crushing it together and huddling it out of sight with as much nervous trepidation as though she had felt herself caught in the perpetration of a crime. She was conscious of really feeling something of the sort, and immediately afterwards, ashamed and angry that it should have been so, raised her head proudly, and confronted the new-comer with a steady look of stately displeasure. The look was so freezing that poor Mrs. Waters, who already had found it a great effort to drag herself a few steps forward into the room, felt all her remaining courage evaporate, and stood unable to offer either explanation or apology.

"I had not expected the honor of seeing you again," said Olivia presently, and her politeness was so chilling that it was more repellent than absolute rudeness might have been. "May I ask to what I am indebted for it?"

She rose as she put the question; she could not sit while her visitor was standing, and she would not ask Harold Maxwell's sister to be seated in her house.

"I am very sorry," Mrs. Waters faltered with some difficulty, on finding herself thus called upon to unfold her business. "I would not have troubled you if I could have helped it—indeed I would not. But I am so unhappy, so anxious, and you are the only person—No, I have not come to ask you for any thing—do not think it—only for an answer to a question. The truth is" (and here the speaker began to tremble so

that she could scarcely articulate), "I have never heard any thing of—of him—my—my brother, you know—never since that day, and I thought perhaps you might be able to tell me—"

"You may spare yourself the trouble of going on," interrupted Olivia with flaming cheeks. "The person of whom you speak is a total stranger to me, and I can say nothing whatever respecting him."

"But you can say surely if he told you any thing about where he intended to go," cried Mrs. Waters, clasping her hands in mingled anguish and entreaty. "Oh! Miss Egerton, do not be cruel to me. I tell you I have lost him—lost him; I do not know even whether he is alive or dead. If he told you what he was going to do—if you have any idea—for pity's sake do not keep it back."

"I recognize no right in you or any one else to trouble me with questions about a person with whom I have not the smallest concern. Still, to shorten the conversation, I do not object to tell you that I have no word of information regarding him either from himself or others. I know nothing whatever about him! and that is all I have to say."

"You know nothing about him!" echoed Mrs. Waters blankly, and an indescribable sense of dismay and disappointment fell upon her like lead. If she had reflected, she would have seen that the chances of her brother's life or death really stood just where they were before; but she was so discouraged by this failure of her last hope that at that moment, with a pang of passionate grief and affection, she gave him up in her own mind for lost.

"I know nothing, and I care nothing," replied Olivia frigidly.

A look of bitterness mingled itself with the sadness on Mrs. Waters's face.

"Ah! how unkind you are, and cold and unforgiving! To hate him like that—after being engaged to marry him—I wonder how— And when he loved you so—ah! how he loved you, to be sure! How can you? how can you?"

"I may rather wonder how you can dare to remind me of what you must know to be the one shame and horror of my life," returned Olivia with sparkling eyes. "And remember, if I really believed what you said last, I should only regard myself as more disgraced and degraded, if possible, than I am already."

"Degraded by his love, do you mean—by Harry's love?" and the eyes generally so mild and subdued in their light flashed as indignantly as Olivia's own. "Degraded! honored, you ought to say; for let me tell you, Miss Egerton, you never were honored so much as when my brother loved you and chose you to be his wife."

The words were uttered so emphatically, and with a face so glowing—not with mere passion, but with genuine sisterly pride and affection—that Olivia for an instant felt almost quelled. But in an instant more she was so angry with this temporary weakness that she made answer, in tones more chilling and incisive than perhaps she had ever used in her life before:

"Your ideas of honor are quite different from mine—so different that the sooner this conversation comes to an end the better. In my estimation it is not an honor, but the grossest insult that can be put upon me, to couple my

name as you have done with that of a man who has committed theft and forgery, no matter how long ago."

"He did not," broke in Mrs. Waters vehemently, and she looked Olivia straight in the face with heaving chest and dilated pupils. "He did not; and whoever says he did is a liar."

As Olivia heard these words, the blood rushed through her veins so impetuously that she almost staggered. But she knew that her interlocutor's eyes were still fixed defiantly upon her, and mastered her agitation sufficiently to ask with contemptuous coldness:

"And if he did not, how comes it that he is content to rest under the accusation?"

A kind of collapse seemed to fall on Mrs. Waters at the question; a spasm passed over her face, a shudder ran through her whole frame; and with a burst of tears she ejaculated:

"Because—because— God forgive me! I am a wretch—a poor, weak, wicked, selfish wretch."

Olivia looked on with a palpitating heart.

"What do you mean by what you have said just now?"

Mrs. Waters dried her eyes hastily.

"Nothing—I don't know—that will do. It seems you can not tell me any thing, so I will go home."

"Stop!" cried Olivia, so peremptorily that the visitor, already on her way to leave the room, wavered and came to a halt. "I insist on knowing what you meant—you meant something, I suppose. What was it? I have a right to know."

"What was it—why, what should it be? I forget now what I said; I was half— There, I must go; they will be waiting for me."

She moved quickly towards the door, but Olivia, coming forward more quickly still, placed herself in the way.

"You do not forget what you said; you know very well what it was. You pretended to believe that your brother was not guilty; you would have liked to make me believe it too if you could." She paused, but the other only trembled and made no answer, and she went on: "But don't think that you succeeded—don't think that I was weak enough to be deceived for one instant. I was surprised at your audacity in trying to deny it, but of course I knew very well that he was guilty—I never doubted it. Ah! and you dare not try again to make me doubt it; you confess by your silence that he is guilty. Yes indeed, if I had not known it before, I should know it now through you."

"He is not guilty!" exclaimed Mrs. Waters with a cry of pain. "He is the noblest, best— There, no more questions—I don't know what I am saying. Let me go, for the love of Heaven!"

She made an endeavor to pass, but Olivia caught her by the arm almost roughly.

"You shall not go until you tell me every thing. You said he was not guilty; what do you mean?"

"Don't ask, for pity's sake—I have said too much already. Ah! if you have any mercy, let that be enough."

"But you must tell me—I must understand— The thing was done, and somebody must have done it. If he was not guilty, who was?"

A deadly paleness overspread Mrs. Waters's

features; her lips absolutely quivered with terror as she felt the searching gaze that fastened itself on her face. At the sight a ray of illumination flashed across Olivia's mind.

"Your husband?" she whispered.

There was a sound of convulsive laboring for breath, then, unable longer to support herself, the poor wife slipped from Olivia's grasp and sank into a chair, wringing her hands and sobbing in a very tempest of sorrow.

Olivia stood by and looked on vacantly—almost like a person stupefied. And stupefied indeed she was, but as one who has been brought suddenly back from darkness into light.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE WIFE'S STORY.

"Your husband?" repeated Olivia, after an interval of silence during which various emotions had chased each other through her mind so swiftly that, like a rapidly revolving succession of colors, their general effect had been utter blankness.

"Ah! but you will not tell—have mercy for God's sake. It was for me and the children—our poor dead children—not himself. Ah! he was so poor, so sorely tempted—you can never know."

"But if he did it, how came another person to be accused?" severely demanded Olivia; then, before there was time to answer, she added with a keen searching look of suspicion: "And how came that other person to let himself be accused?"

"He did not know it at first; he thought he was only shielding us, and afterwards he was too generous—Ah! dear Miss Egerton—"

"He was betrayed, then?" flashed out Olivia.

"Do not be angry; only bear with me a little, and I will tell you—But oh! my poor husband—you will have mercy—"

"Tell me every thing—this moment—I insist."

"I will, I will, but do not look at me like that; be a little gentle, or I can not."

"There, I will be very gentle;" and, with a great struggle for patience, Olivia seated herself by her visitor's side and endeavored to set an example of external calmness. "And now tell me, how did it happen? Tell me every thing from the beginning."

"It was just after Emmy was born," began Mrs. Waters in a low voice, with difficulty restraining her sobs in obedience to the authority of Olivia's look and manner—"just after Emmy was born, and when our other dear children were beginning to sicken with the fever. You know what we had to live on (we were in debt, besides, to some of the tradespeople at the time), and I was very weak, and the doctor recommended me and the children all sorts of nourishing things, and the baby was to be sent to a neighbor's to be out of the infection, and there was not a farthing of money in the house to pay for it all: and if we had asked any thing from old Mr. Waters it would only have made him so angry that he would never have forgiven us. Ah! when you think of what Austin must have gone through then—and he had to bear it all by himself too, for I was to be kept very quiet, so that he never said a word to me of what he had in his mind. Oh! if he only had!"

She sighed bitterly, so bitterly that if Olivia had not been engrossed by an all-absorbing interest of her own she could hardly have failed to sympathize with her. But as it was, Olivia merely made a movement of impatience and said:

"Go on."

Mrs. Waters obeyed, but her voice was lower and more faltering than ever.

"So he kept on and on, thinking over his miseries by himself, and at last one evening—he told me afterwards it was just after the doctor had said I must have port-wine three times a day—one evening he sat up very late, and—and—Ah! you see what I mean; well, it was then that he did it."

"Forged something with old Mr. Waters's signature, you mean?"

"Yes. But oh! only think how he was tempted. And you know old Mr. Waters had promised to leave us all his money, and this hundred pounds—it was only a hundred—would have been nothing to him one way or another. It was only by chance he came to find out it had been—been taken—at all."

"Go on. You have not told me yet how any one else—"

"I will tell you now. He—Harry, you know—had just left Oxford, and was up in London about a tutorship in some family he had been introduced to. And—and—that same night that he had done it Austin sent the—the thing, you understand—in a letter to Harry, asking him to take it to Mr. Waters's bank in London and get the money."

"Ah, yes! and so draw suspicion on himself; I see," said Olivia with gleaming eyes.

"Ah! but Austin did not mean that—indeed, indeed he did not. He loved Harry like a brother, he did really—then; he would not have hurt him for all the world. But he knew he would be found out at once if he offered such a thing to any body in the neighborhood, and he thought that if he could get a stranger to draw the money in London—That was all he thought of, I do assure you."

"Very well—let it be so. What next?"

"So he sent it to Harry, pretending it was a present he had got from old Mr. Waters on condition that I should know nothing about it, and asked him to bring the money when he came."

"When he came?"

"Yes; it had been settled he should come down to see us on his way to Cornwall, where this family lived that he was going to. And he did come—poor Harry—and brought Austin what he wanted, little guessing, of course, how it was; and then next day he went off again; for, with so much illness in the house, we could not do any thing to welcome him. Ah! I remember how he came to my room that morning to say good-bye, and how he tried to comfort me about the children, and said he would return in a fortnight and find us all well. For he was not to go to Cornwall at once; he had a few spare days that he was going to spend on a walking excursion in Wales, and then he was to come back to us again. But he did not come back—I never saw him from that time to the day I found him sitting with you and Emmy in the drawing-room at Nidbourne. Ah! how little I knew the parting would be so long!"

She paused, weeping violently, but was soon urged forward again by Olivia, who had been listening in breathless impatience.

"And what happened next? It was found out—"

"Ah yes! so soon! Old Mr. Waters took it into his head to draw all his money out of the bank only a few days afterwards, and when he found there was a hundred pounds wrong in the accounts—ah! you know what he was, and you may think of the terrible passion—"

"But how did he get to suspect—any body in particular?"

"A clerk came down from the bank, the clerk who had paid the money on the—the thing—and he described the person who had presented it, and old Mr. Waters had always hated Harry because he was my brother, and guessed at once. And of course he thought that Harry had—had—done every thing."

"Well? and then?"

"And then he sent for Austin, and told him. Ah! what a day that was—I could never forget it if I lived a thousand years. I was sitting with my poor eldest boy on my knee (I was better then, but he was wasting away under that dreadful fever day by day), and Austin came in—oh! so pale—and said he had something to speak to me about. And I had to come away from my poor dying child to listen, and he told me every thing, for he could not keep it from me longer—how wicked he had been, and how it must all be found out the moment Harry came back, and Harry was expected back every day. Oh! when I think of it all, I wonder how I can have lived through it! And then he went away like a madman, and never came back again all that day. I thought he had gone away to kill himself."

"But he did not kill himself. What did he do?"

"He went along the road that he thought Harry would come back by, trying to meet him."

"Yes, and he did meet him, I understand that already. And he asked him—"

"He asked him to keep out of the way so as not to be questioned about who gave him the—that horrible paper. He told him every thing—"

"I see, but not the one thing that it concerned him to know. Not that the person who presented that paper was suspected of being the person who forged it, and could only clear himself by telling the truth?"

Mrs. Waters lowered her eyes under Olivia's penetrating gaze.

"Do not be too hard upon him—my poor husband—" she pleaded. "He was thinking of me and the children—if he had been found out he would have been sent to prison, and we should have starved. Old Mr. Waters would have had no pity."

"Well, well, go on. So he—Harry" (it was the first time the name had passed Olivia's lips since the fatal day of discovery)—"he consented to keep away, I suppose, and by keeping away confirmed all suspicions?"

Mrs. Waters breathed a half-inaudible affirmative.

"But he found out afterwards what he had done?" went on Olivia.

"Yes, through the newspapers, but not for some days, and when he did he could not find

it in his heart—he would have had to come out from his hiding and say it was Austin who did it, you know, and Austin had been good to him once, and given him a home when he needed one. And I was his sister, too, and in such trouble, for we had just lost our boy, and the other children were following—our little girl died the same day we got Harry's letter."

"Harry's letter?"

"Yes, he wrote to say that he knew now what people thought of him, that it had cost him a great struggle, but that he had made up his mind. And then he promised that for my sake and the sake of the benefits Austin had done him, he would go on as he had begun, and help us to keep the secret till the end; he would give up for us his country and his name and every thing."

"And you and your husband did not refuse the offer?" asked Olivia sternly.

"What could we do? Poor Austin—for my sake and the children's he dared not speak; and I—you would not have had me betray my husband, surely? But oh! what I have suffered all these years—what we have both suffered, I mean—you would pity me if you knew."

"And he—Harry—have you never thought of what he must have suffered, bearing the burden of another man's disgrace?" said Olivia, trembling very much, partly with indignation, partly with—something else.

"Ah! it is thinking of that, and nothing but that, which has made me so miserable," cried Mrs. Waters, casting an appealing look at Olivia through her tears, as though entreating compassion. But Olivia was so occupied with her own emotions that the look was altogether lost on her, and, with a fiery light of resolution in her eyes, she rejoined:

"But the burden shall be taken off now. I know the truth at last, and it shall be my care that all the world shall know it too. Ah! thank God that I shall be able to do something for him after wronging him so!"

"What!" shrieked Mrs. Waters, "you would tell— Ah! no, no, for mercy's sake! My husband—you do not know—it will drive him mad."

"I can not help that. Justice must be done, and shall be done. Ah! Harry, how could I believe—"

"But Austin will kill himself. Oh! if you have any pity—if you have ever felt a grain of friendship— And what good is it to do? There is no disgrace now; nobody here knows he was my brother—not at least if you have kept our secret, as you said you would."

"That makes no difference; I choose that he shall be able to bear his own name again, and be proud of it. And you forget that one person has known all along—the person who told me. Do you imagine I will consent to have it thought even by one man that I ought to feel ashamed where I have most cause to feel honored?"

She made a step towards the door; evidently she had taken her determination, and was prepared to put it into immediate execution. Mrs. Waters saw that it was so, and clutched at her dress with the energy of despair.

"Miss Egerton—stay—one moment—for his sake—my brother's. You love him, I think? Ah yes! I see you do."

"I do," said Olivia, proudly; "I love him more than my own life."

"Then for his sake have mercy on my poor husband even as he had mercy. If you love him, don't undo what he has done—don't let his sacrifice be vain."

Olivia did not speak, but Mrs. Waters fancied that her manner showed symptoms of hesitation, and with passionate entreaty went on:

"If you tell, it would be better that he had never been silent. Austin might have lived through it then; but now, with all his grand new friends to talk about him, and poor Emmy—Ah! I know what he would do—he would kill himself, I know he would. And then all that Harry has done for us would be undone, and worse than undone, all his suffering and self-denial wasted. Oh! could you wish that? do you think that he could wish it?"

For a while Olivia was still mute, but her compressed lips and quivering eyelids showed that a violent struggle was taking place within her. At last she raised her eyes, and said, in a clear, steady voice:

"His sacrifice shall not be made vain through me. If he does not wish for his own sake that every thing should be told, I will not wish it for mine, no, nor even for his. I give you my word."

"Oh! Miss Egerton, dear Miss Egerton—"

"You owe me no thanks; it is for him, and him alone. What he has done I will not undo without his wish. And if others, not knowing the truth, despise and point at me, I will glory in being despised and pointed at for his sake."

"God bless you for loving him so, Olivia!"

"Yes, he shall see that I can make a sacrifice too. Let him be looked down upon and held disgraced by all the world: let me be looked down upon and held disgraced for loving him—it will be my privilege to give up something for him, after treating him as I did. But he shall not be looked down upon either—Randal shall have Egerton Park, and I can trust him to be silent enough; it was all of me that he wanted."

She spoke with strange contempt and bitterness; in the few minutes during which she had known of Harold Maxwell's innocence, Randal Egerton, without any fault of his own, had lost every jot of his laboriously acquired footing in her friendship, and even in her esteem. She paused, thinking with a shudder of what she had been so near doing that very morning, and presently resumed:

"And then we—Harry and I—shall go from England together, to India, or wherever he pleases—anywhere so that it be far enough away from all who knew us here—and live for each other and in each other; ah! what a happy life that will be!—if only he will forgive me, that is."

"If only he is living!" murmured Mrs. Waters in broken accents.

Olivia looked up in sudden fear; the words, and still more the tone of suppressed anguish in which they had been uttered, filled her with indescribable alarm.

"What do you mean? If he is living! what doubt—Ah yes; you came to ask me—you had never heard from him, you said. But what of that? It does not prove—Living! of course he is living; how dare you try to make me afraid?"

"Because—because I am so afraid myself,"

sobbed Mrs. Waters, unable longer to conceal the agony which her terror cost her.

"Afraid! why afraid? what are you afraid of?" said Olivia breathlessly. "Let me know every thing; the worst; it is my right."

"Perhaps all is well; perhaps I have no cause— But I am miserable, and I can not help it."

And then, with a great effort at self-composure, Mrs. Waters gave Olivia the whole history of her anxiety—how she had met her brother coming from Egerton House pale and haggard, and scarcely capable of coherent speech; how he had promised to write and had never written; how she had heard that his things were still lying unclaimed at the village inn; how for one weary day after another she had waited for a scrap of news of him in vain. As she spoke, she watched Olivia intently, in the hope of finding that the circumstances which carried such apprehension to her own mind did not appear equally suggestive of evil to another hearing them for the first time. But Olivia was listening with straining eyes, pale cheeks, and a look of intense anxiety that made the sister's heart turn cold within her.

"And what do you think then has become of him?" asked Olivia in a hoarse voice, when she had heard every thing.

"I don't know—I dare not think too much. He looked so ill, so different from himself: sometimes I am afraid something must have happened to him that very day—some accident or—worse than an accident, perhaps. He was not fit to be alone."

Olivia evidently understood all that was meant, for her pale face grew yet paler, and for some seconds she remained mute with dismay. After a while, recovering somewhat, she said:

"At least nothing happened quite immediately. I had something from him by post next evening."

"A letter!" cried Mrs. Waters, her eyes lighting up with a ray of new hope. "Ah! why did you not tell me—"

"No, not a letter," said Olivia sadly—"not a word of writing; he despised me too much for that. It was a ring I had given him once; he scorned to keep any thing of mine after what I had done, and no wonder."

"And what did he say? Where was he?"

"I tell you he said nothing. There was only the envelope addressed in his hand, and the ring wrapped up in a blank piece of paper inside."

"But there was a postmark, surely?"

"A postmark—yes, to be sure, a postmark!" cried Olivia feverishly. "I never noticed, but there must have been, of course. I will look now; I have it somewhere, I know."

And with trembling haste Olivia flew to a cabinet, into a drawer of which she remembered tossing the envelope and its inclosure immediately on receiving it. The very sight of such a memorial of Harold Maxwell had been abhorrent to her, and yet somehow she had not been able to bring herself to destroy it.

She had never ventured to open the drawer since that day, and laid her hand instantly on what she wanted.

"The postmark is Southampton," she announced presently.

"Southampton!" and a gleam of joy flickered



across Mrs. Waters's face. "He was on his way back to India, then? So perhaps it is true what Austin thinks; perhaps he had to leave in a hurry, and had no time— But surely he might have found some way of sending a letter afterwards. Oh! if only I could know something certain; I can not bear this cruel doubt longer. Is there any way of knowing, do you think?"

"The thing would be to ask at the shipping offices at Southampton. And I will go to ask this very day; before I lay my head on my pillow I must have news of him."

"I will go with you," said Mrs. Waters eagerly.

"And wherever he may have gone," continued Olivia, with impassioned energy—"wherever he may have gone I will follow, that I may ask him on my knees to pardon me and give me back his love. If I were to write to him and say that I was ready to leave England and this place for his sake, I know what he would answer—that he would not accept the sacrifice, as he would call it. But if I speak to him, if I see him face to face, and tell him I have decided—ah! he will not, he can not refuse then."

"Dear Olivia! dear sister!"

"Dear Agnes! Yes, you are my sister indeed—you are his, and I see you love him. Let us go then at once—you will go with me, I think you said?"

"Yes, to Southampton; I can not live longer without hearing of him."

"It will be a great comfort to have you. But you must come now—immediately; I can not wait."

"I will only return home and tell Austin where I am going, and then I will meet you at the station. There will be a train in about an hour, I think."

"That is enough; I will expect you. And now don't lose another instant; remember, if you are not there I must go alone."

But Mrs. Waters needed no exhortation to haste. She seized Olivia's hand and pressed it to her lips, then flew on the way towards home with an elasticity of step which more than any thing else showed that the capacity for hope was renewed within her.

Olivia went to prepare for her journey with a full heart—full to overflowing with exultant joy and tenderness, and yet also with strange, gnawing anxiety. Ah! when once she should find him, how happy she would be, how proud of him, how penitent, and yet how triumphant! Surely in this world there would be no creature so blessed as herself.

When once she should find him!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

MRS. WATERS made her way home that day very quickly. She spent a few minutes up stairs in hasty preparation, and then, being ready for departure, descended to the library to seek her husband, not, however, without some little reluctance in the midst of her impatience. It was necessary that he should be told where she was going and with what object, and yet, as she thought of the explanation which such telling

might involve, she could not help feeling some dread of the interview.

He was alone in the room, pacing up and down with slow, thoughtful strides. At the sound of the opening door he came to a halt and looked round, when, seeing who was entering, he said, eagerly:

"Come in, Agnes; I have good news for you. Podmore says he is pretty sure now of being able to manage them—the creditors, you know. To-day will let half stand over on interest for three years, and, as he is the principal one, there is no doubt the others will do the same. Eh! that's good, isn't it?"

"Very good," said Mrs. Waters faintly, yet somewhat relieved by the momentary respite.

"I am very glad to hear it."

"Glad! I should think so. And so it will come right with me, you see, after every thing said and done—with me and all of us, that is."

"I hope so, dear. But"—here, with an effort to surmount her hesitation, she made a few wavering steps forward—"but I have come to say good-bye. I am going away for a day or two."

"Going away!" he echoed, staring at her blankly.

"Yes, I am going to Southampton with Miss Egerton."

"Southampton!"

"Yes; it seems that Harry went there that day, and we want—"

"You have heard of him!" cried Austin, with a sudden huskiness in his voice. "Then he is not—I mean, then he is alive?"

"Ah! pray God he may be! But we know nothing yet, except that he went to Southampton that day; we are going to try to find out at the shipping offices. I hope—I hope—and yet, when I think how he has kept me all this time without a letter—"

She turned her head away, overcome with returning anxiety; else she might have noticed that while she had been speaking Austin's brow had become manifestly clearer. But presently, as he stood there meditating, his look grew troubled again, and after a short silence he asked, rather unsteadily:

"Miss Egerton—did you say Miss Egerton was going with you?"

"Yes, I am to meet her at the station," answered the wife, as calmly as she could, but with secret apprehension of what might be coming.

"But why should she care?" he asked again, looking very pale. "I thought she was so bitter—"

"People may be very bitter and repent afterwards. She was bitter once, but she loved him all the time, and it was only natural she should be softened towards him."

"And do you mean to say that she has forgiven—"

"She is going to ask him to forgive her. If he lives and we succeed in finding him, she will be his wife."

"You have told her?" asked Austin with a muffled cry, and his face became deadly white to the very lips, while his limbs shook under him as though palsy-smitten. "Oh! if I thought you had; if I thought—"

"Austin, dear Austin!" put in his wife imploringly.

"Have you told her? Yes or no, or I shall choke."

"It was not my fault," murmured Mrs. Waters in agony—"indeed it was not. She guessed it, and would not let me keep it back; if you had only heard the questions—"

"You have told her!" he cried, and a sudden change came over him, which showed how imperfectly, till this moment, he had realized the full import of his suspicions. "You have!" He waved his arms wildly over his head, and, staggering backwards, sank faint and powerless into a chair, where, covering his eyes with his hands, he sat making such convulsive gasps for breath that his wife flew to his side in consternation.

"Austin, no, don't be afraid; you are safe—quite safe—you are, indeed. She has promised never to tell, promised solemnly. Ah! dear Austin, for Heaven's sake—No one shall ever hear—no one; she has given me her word, and you surely know her well enough to believe that she will never break it."

He did not answer, but his breathing became calmer and more equal, and she saw that she had succeeded to some extent in reassuring him.

"Ah yes! you do believe, dear Austin, I see you do. You know how I love you, you know how it would break my heart if any thing were said against you; then you may surely believe me when I tell you there is no danger. Dear, dear husband, you can not think I would deceive you."

She knelt down, and would have pressed her cheek against his; but he shrank from her touch, saying harshly:

"You do not love me; you hate me, and have done your best to kill me. I will not live to be pointed at, you know I will not."

He pushed her away sullenly. She was grieved and wounded, and yet felt comforted too; any thing was better than the depth of despairing terror into which he had been sunk just now.

"You shall not be pointed at, Austin. You have nothing to fear, take my word for it—nothing whatever."

He was evidently a good deal relieved, but he only shook his head moodily.

"It pleases you to say so," he muttered, with a spasmodic contraction of the fingers.

"I do not say so without good cause. I tell you Miss Egerton has promised solemnly that our secret shall be hers too—not for our sake, but his; she loves him, and she will not let his sacrifice be made vain. And what she promises to do for Harry's sake, that you may be sure she will do."

He made a movement of fretful impatience.

"Oh yes! for his sake—he is every thing with you all. You have betrayed me for his sake, and she will betray me too."

"No, she will not, believe me she will not; but indeed I see you almost believe me already. She has expressly promised never to tell except by his leave, so you may understand how safe you are."

"I don't know about that," said Austin, half nervously, half peevishly. "He would have told long ago, I dare say, only he had not the courage to break such a promise as he made us; and if he can get somebody else to tell for him, he will be only too glad, perhaps."

"I think you might know him better than that by this time, after all he has done for us."

"After all he has done for us! And what has he done so very great, pray? He only thought at the time he was keeping back a little evidence; he did not intend to suffer himself—not he. And if he did suffer a little, as it turned out, I'm sure I've been grateful enough, grateful till I'm tired, and so I tell you. I'm not going to be down on my knees before him all my life just because he did me a favor once; and it was the least he could do for me, goodness knows, after all I had done for him first."

"Oh! Austin, how can you speak like that—so ungenerously, so ungratefully?"

"Ungratefully; I tell you I won't be grateful any longer, I have nothing to be grateful for. If he wished me to be grateful, why did he come back where he was not wanted? how dared he show his face among our friends to bring disgrace and ruin on our heads? Grateful, indeed—I hate him."

Mrs. Waters recoiled as though she had been struck; then, turning away, commented with mournful bitterness:

"If you can say that, I have nothing to answer."

"Well, well, perhaps I did not mean quite that—of course I did not. But you can not wonder much. Only to think of all the benefits I heaped upon him once, and now to be repaid by being brought to shame before all the world—my own child—"

He paused, shuddering.

She looked at him reproachfully, yet half-compassionately as well.

"How often am I to tell you that there is not the slightest danger? If you do not believe me, you can see Miss Egerton if you like; she will tell you the same."

"How dare you? What! ask me to see Miss Egerton—to talk to Miss Egerton about—" Again he shuddered; then, looking up with a sudden flashing of the eye, he exclaimed fiercely: "If I were to see Miss Egerton, I would tell her it was all a lie."

"Oh! Austin, what is the use of speaking so?" said Mrs. Waters with pitying expostulation, but feeling a little startled nevertheless.

"But I would," he rejoined more deliberately, and, as though gaining new strength from the idea, he rose and made a few paces to and fro. "And if you don't take care what you do, I will; yes, I am not sure but that I will, even as it is. My word is worth as much as yours, at all events."

"You will find she loves him far too well to believe you."

"I am not so sure of that. And even supposing she does not believe me herself, she will have the sense to see that other people would believe me if she dared to come out with her story. Yes, I will. I will tell her that you did not know what you were saying, that you are so fond of him—You may contradict me again afterwards if you like, but nobody will believe you without proofs, and you know very well you have got none."

Mrs. Waters had grown very pale while her husband was speaking, but as he ceased the color began to return slightly to her cheeks, and she drew a long breath, as though reassured.

"You are mistaken," she answered, with a look of stern defiance quite new to her face. "I have a proof which will convince any body, and if you do what you say I will produce it."

He started, and fell back a step or two, looking very blank; then, recovering himself with a visible effort, he smiled, and said, faintly:

"I don't believe you. What proof?"

"The letter which you wrote to Harry when you sent him the—you know what—and asked him to bring the money for it."

Again he started, and an ashy whiteness overspread his face. But again he controlled himself sufficiently to force his quivering lips into a smile while he articulated:

"That letter—I don't believe you; how could you come by it? No, it is impossible—I don't believe you."

"You will soon understand how I came by it. Do you not remember that when Harry went away for his journey in Wales he left his things here for us to take care of?"

Austin uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"Ah! that shows what a lie you are telling. And don't you remember that Uncle Gilbert took every thing away when—when he found out? How could you have got hold of a letter or any thing else? Ah! I knew it was a lie—all a lie."

"It is all truth. Your uncle did not take every thing of Harry's away—he thought he did, but he did not. There was a writing-case which I had hidden; I did not know then what was in it, but I did not choose that my brother's private papers should be read by that cruel old man."

Austin did not speak, but the moisture that had suddenly started on his forehead showed how deeply he was agitated. Meanwhile his wife continued:

"And a few months afterwards, when Harry was in India, he wrote (you might remember it if you had taken notice at the time)—he wrote asking me to send him our mother's portrait, which was in the desk he had left with us. You did not know I had the desk at all, and I did not tell you even then for fear of your uncle discovering; but as soon as I could I opened it, and found the portrait, and sent it myself to Harry. And as I was looking over the papers and old letters to see if there was any thing else that Harry might like to have, I came upon—what I have told you of already."

Austin groaned, but still did not answer; it was evident that he was only too well convinced of the truth of his wife's statement.

"I thought of destroying it," she went on in a breaking voice, "but I could not; I felt that it would be like treason to take away the proof of his innocence. And yet for your sake I hated it so. I have had it in my hand two or three times since then to tear it up, but I always stopped myself. So I kept it—I have it still; and oh! how thankful I am that it is so!"

He stood looking at her in silent bewilderment, then, shaking himself violently out of his lethargy, he sprang forward with a loud cry, and clutched her roughly by the arm.

"Give me that letter!" he vociferated, and drew her towards him so fiercely that she blanched with pain and fear. "That letter—that letter, instantly!"

She felt herself tremble from head to foot, but,

summoning all her strength, looked him steadily in the face, and with apparent calmness answered:

"No. You may kill me if you like, but while I live that letter you shall not have."

He tightened his grasp yet further, and glared at her with such an aspect of maniacal fury that she was ready to swoon with terror—terror for him yet more than for herself. But still she looked at him unflinchingly, and in a moment more he relaxed his hold, and, reeling like a drunken man, retreated a few steps backward to the table, leaning heavily against it to save himself from falling. She felt as though they had both escaped some dire impending calamity.

She waited a little to recover breath; then, seeing him still stand as one whose whole strength of body and mind is shattered, said soothingly:

"You have no cause to be afraid. I do not choose to give you that letter because I should feel that I was doing a wrong to Harry, but it will never be seen by any one except through your own fault. If you are only content to trust, every thing will be as though no scrap of proof were in existence, and after what I have said you may be content to trust, surely. Miss Egerton has promised never to tell what she knows except with Harry's permission; and even if he lives and if we find him, you may be sure that his permission will never be given."

The words were uttered with a tranquil deliberation more calculated than perhaps any thing else to appease violent unreasoning agitation, and even as she spoke she had the satisfaction of seeing him become calmer. His breath came and went more regularly; he took his hands from the table and stood erect an instant as though to test his strength; then, feebly indeed, but no longer reeling as before, moved to a chair and seated himself with an air almost of composure.

"Has any one besides you ever seen it?" he asked presently.

"No one, I declare to you, no one," said Mrs. Waters emphatically, only too glad to be able to answer something to reassure him. "No one has so much as seen the outside of the desk where it is kept—except, indeed, once Emmy," she added, correcting herself.

"Emmy! But you did not tell Emmy what—"

"How can you think of such a thing? She only saw the desk, and I did not even tell her whom it had belonged to."

He seemed relieved, and remained silent a little time as though reflecting; it was manifest that he was fast regaining his self-possession.

"I am very glad to hear you have been so careful, Agnes. And this desk, where do you keep it, then?"

He looked up keenly as he put the question—so keenly that, hardly knowing why, his wife suppressed the straightforward answer which was already almost on her tongue, and responded evasively:

"I keep it where it is quite safe, you need not be afraid. But I must go now; we have to be in Southampton this evening."

"Where is the hurry? Stay a little longer; I want to ask you—"

She stopped him hastily, with an instinctive avoidance of interrogation.

"I can not wait. Miss Egerton wants me to

help her to find out about Harry. She is impatient—and I am impatient too.”

She moved forward to leave the room. Austin half rose from his chair as though to detain her, but he found himself weaker than he expected, and fell back again.

“I believe you care for that man more than you do for me,” he muttered querulously as she passed him.

She said nothing, but went straight to the door. The patient forbearance with which her love and her pity had so long inspired her had at last well-nigh given way to contempt for his selfishness and cowardice, and at that moment she was conscious of a coldness towards him such as she had never felt before—such coldness that, as she heard him accuse her of caring for her brother more than for himself, something rebellious rose up within her and told her that he was right. Had not her brother deserved far more at her hands?

She had already opened the door, and, with this rebellious feeling at her heart, was in the act of passing out of the room, when an accidental look round showed her the broken-down figure of her husband sitting despondingly where she had left him, with the light shining full on his scant grizzled hair, and on that furrowed brow which she remembered so smooth and joyous. At the sight there came over her an irresistible impulse of self-reproachful tenderness. She turned quickly back, and, going up to him almost before he was aware of it, cast her arms fondly round him and pressed a kiss on his cheek.

“Dear Austin, say good-bye to me. You know I love you better than any creature in the world.”

As he felt her embrace he drew her towards him, and kissed her passionately.

“Good-bye,” he said, and this time his voice did not sound querulously, but was more like her husband’s than she had heard it for months.

She could have staid with him for hours longer, but every moment was of consequence, and with one last pressure of the hand she tore herself away, her heart aching with a compassionate love of which just before she could not have believed herself capable. But though that farewell had cost her a pang which she might otherwise have spared herself, she was glad that she had gone back to say it. The time came when she had still more reason to be glad.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### ON THE TRACK.

THE winter evening had long closed in when, amidst a storm of wind and rain which made the station lamps glimmer with uncertain light through a hazy veil of damp that penetrated everywhere, the two fellow-travellers from Chorcombe alighted at Southampton. The journey had been very trying to both, not so much from its length as from the anxiety on which it gave them leisure to brood, and which only became more oppressive as they neared their destination. But, wearied as they were in mind no less than in body, neither felt inclined to rest. The first condition of rest was the definitive intelligence which they had come so far to seek; and, having ascertained the address of the agents from whom they would be most likely to obtain news

of the missing man, supposing them to be right in their conjectures as to his movements, they started on their way thither without delay.

Little or nothing was said between them as they drove through the wet, dark streets—dark save for an unsteady flicker from lamps and shop-lights, which only served to remind them the more of the inclemency of the night and of the unfamiliarity of their surroundings. Suspense generally grows more tormenting as the time approaches for deciding it; and partly from the fatigue of the journey, partly from the gloomy aspect of every thing about them—the wet pavements shining darkly under the gaslights, the dimly-seen figures of men and women hurrying along the half-deserted streets in quest of shelter—both Mrs. Waters and Olivia felt the spirit of hope much less strong within them than it had been when they left home. Neither of them could have very well said what it was that she feared, but an undefinable sense of dread and despondency settled more and more heavily upon each. It has been seen how impatient they had been to make their inquiries that evening, and yet, when at last the fly stopped, and they found that they were expected to alight, both were conscious of feeling that they would have liked to delay, if possible, a little longer.

But it was too late for hesitation now; the critical moment had arrived, and they were obliged to face it. Olivia was the first to descend, and, bidding the driver await their return, gave her arm to her trembling companion, whom she led forward to the place where a half-open door showed the way into an obscurely-lighted passage.

Somebody whom they could not see was fumbling at the inner handle of the door as they came up. Olivia tapped gently, and immediately a round bullet-head, with an upright shock of hair, and sharp, youthful features, presented itself in the opening.

“No admittance to-night, miss,” said a juvenile but very decided voice. “Office just closed.”

Olivia had been shrinking from the necessity of immediate action, and yet now the prospect of waiting till to-morrow seemed unendurable.

“We have called on very particular business,” she said impudently. “Pray do not send us away; we will not detain you long.”

The round bullet-head was shaken inexorably.

“We don’t do no more business to-night. It ain’t a bit of good asking.”

Olivia looked at her friend in despair. What were they to do? Suddenly a bright idea occurred to her, and taking out her purse she turned once more towards the door.

“Here are five shillings for you, my good boy. Will you let us in now?”

The youth eyed the proffered coin very longingly, but still hesitated. Presently he held out his hand, and said:

“I’ll see what I can do for you, if you like. But I don’t expect it’s any use.”

“Try,” said Olivia, and dropped the money into his hand, which instantly closed upon it very tightly.

The ladies were straightway admitted, but no farther than the passage, where they were left standing while their conductor went forward to a glass door opening into the office.

“If you please, sir, here are two ladies want-

ing to see you on very particular business," they heard him say.

"No business done to-night," answered a voice inside—a voice which to the applicants without sounded very gruff and formidable. "Let them call again to-morrow."

"I told them so, sir, but they were so set on coming in that I thought I might as well mention it. They seem very nice ladies, sir."

"Let them call again to-morrow," repeated the gruff voice.

The boy was retiring with his answer when, on turning to leave the room, he found the two ladies confronting him on the threshold.

"Pray do not refuse us," entreated Olivia, addressing herself to a little gray-headed, black-eyed man of somewhat stern and uncompromising appearance, who was in the act of locking up a huge safe as she presented herself. "We have only come to ask one question, and if you knew what suspense we are suffering—"

"The office was closed five minutes ago," was the obdurate response. "We never do business after-hours."

"Please don't send us away without an answer," said Olivia appealingly. "We would have called sooner, but we have been travelling a long way, and have only just arrived. And we are so unhappy, so anxious—both of us," she added, with a look of tender solicitude at her companion, whose arm she felt trembling within her own.

The little man scrutinized both his visitors very attentively, but with a look so stern and unsympathizing that Olivia felt all petition to be unavailing in such a quarter.

"We never do business after-hours," he repeated stolidly. "What was it you were going to ask?"

Olivia was taken quite by surprise at the question.

"There is a—a friend of ours," she answered in sudden embarrassment—"this lady's brother, in fact—we wish to know if he has sailed for India, for Bombay, because if not— Ah no! Agnes, pray."

"Because if not, he must be dead," broke out his sister with a sob, which she could not repress.

The little man looked at her again very narrowly, then brought back his scrutiny to bear with equal attention on Olivia.

"It is quite against the rule for us to answer questions after the hour of closing," he said dogmatically. "About what time do you think this friend of yours started?"

"About the beginning of this month. Oh! if you would only be so kind—"

"And what is his name?"

"The name is Graham," said Olivia, turning all at once from pale to red. "Oh! how are we ever to thank you!" she exclaimed, as the little man reached down a large volume and began fluttering over the leaves.

"It is quite against the rule. Graham, you say—about the beginning of this month—to Bombay." He turned over a few leaves slowly, while Olivia held her breath with suspense. "Here is the name Graham, I see—passage taken out on the 4th; would that be about the time?"

"The very day he left us!" cried Olivia, with a burst of joy and thankfulness.

"We must remember that Graham is not an uncommon name," cautiously put in the little man, noticing something of her ecstasy. "I see the Christian name is Henry; is that what you expected?"

"Yes. Oh! thank you, thank you a thousand times!"

"And the address was Petchley's Family Hotel; is that right?"

"I don't know any thing about that, but the name is enough. Henry Graham—on the 4th—oh yes! we have found him, there can be no doubt."

"He is far enough out of England by this time, you must understand," said the little man, again making a benevolent endeavor to moderate what must have seemed to him her unreasoning excess of gladness. "The ship he booked by was to sail on the 7th."

"Oh! but that makes no difference; it is he, and that is enough. Dear Agnes, you are comforted now, are you not?"

Mrs. Waters did not speak a word. The load of doubt and fear which for weeks had been pressing on her so heavily was abruptly withdrawn, and she was almost giddy with joyfulness. But what she could not say her look sufficiently interpreted.

Olivia again expressed her thanks to the little man, who received them tolerably graciously, with only a muttered allusion to the rule of answering no questions after business hours. The two friends took leave, and once again found themselves in the darkness which had looked so ominously dreary a little while ago, but which scarcely looked dreary at all now.

"Where to, ladies?" said the driver, holding open the door of his fly as they prepared to re-enter.

Olivia paused; the question of what was to be their next destination had not yet occurred to her.

"Petchley's Family Hotel," she answered with sudden decision.

It was necessary that they should rest somewhere in the town that night, and she instinctively chose that the place which had once sheltered her lover should shelter her. Besides, was it not possible that there they might obtain some further tidings?

The fly rattled on through the dark streets (the same streets, some of them, through which it had passed before, and yet how different they seemed now!), stopping at last in front of an open door, above which were painted, in large letters lighted by a flaring gas-lamp, the words, "Petchley's Family Hotel."

Petchley's Family Hotel was a large building situated in one of the main thoroughfares of the town, not so large as to come within the category of the huge caravansaries where the guest's name is merged in his number and the landlord's individuality evaporates in a Board of Directors, yet large enough to be quite unlike the old-fashioned hosteleries where each separate guest is made to feel himself of consequence to the welfare of the concern, and is petted and fussed over, on arrival and departure, with a show almost of personal regard.

Mrs. Waters and Olivia, arriving at this well-ordered establishment, were not fussed over, by any means, but received with a great deal of

stately decorum and formality. A white-cravatted middle-aged head-waiter first appeared, and ordered an underling to see after the ladies' luggage; and before the visitors had time to say that they had no luggage to see after, a sumptuous personage rustling in moire antique, who might have been a duchess, but was only the landlady, came forward to ask what accommodation was required. On being answered board and lodging till next morning, this haughty dame retired, perhaps all the sooner that she perceived no luggage to be forthcoming, handing the visitors over to the escort of a chambermaid. If she had been a landlady of a different type, they would probably not have gone up stairs without trying to engage her in conversation about a certain recent guest of hers; but with so magnificent a person they felt that all gossip would be out of place, and, though not without a sense of disappointment, meekly followed their allotted guide.

They duly looked at the rooms awarded them, and were presently installed, as comfortably as circumstances permitted, in a large and somewhat chilly sitting-room, where the middle-aged head-waiter made tea for them, while his subordinate, down on his knees before the grate, endeavored to coax a handful of damp sticks into a blaze.

"Shall I put any green in, ma'am?" asked the waiter at the tea-table, appealing to Olivia as the person who had hitherto given all the orders.

"Just as you like," said Olivia carelessly; "it is all the same."

"Some parties are so much prepossessed against green tea," explained the waiter apologetically. "But for my own part, I think it makes a wonderful refreshing beverage after a journey."

Olivia looked at the man more attentively than she had yet done. He was very precise and formal in his external get-up, as accorded with the dignity of head-waiter at such an establishment; but there was a weather-beaten look of long service in his face, and a general air of conciliation in his manner, which reminded one that after all he was only a fellow-creature obliged to work probably pretty hard for his living, and doubtless standing in as much awe of the superb lady down stairs as any one else. Altogether he looked a great deal more approachable than his mistress, and Olivia felt emboldened to remark:

"I suppose in this house you have a great deal to do with people on their way out to India or the colonies?"

"Oh dear, yes, ma'am, and coming home too. It is quite surprising really how many of such parties we see; as I often say, unless one witnessed it with one's own eyes one wouldn't hardly credit it."

He closed the lid of the tea-pot with great elaboration, lingering still to give it a last polishing touch with his napkin; evidently he was in very conversable humor. Olivia hesitated a moment, and then ventured tremulously to inquire:

"Do you remember a gentleman of the name of Graham coming here three or four weeks ago?"

The waiter shook his head dubiously, and, giving a parting flick to the tea-pot with his napkin as though he expected to touch up his memory by the same process, answered deliberately:

"A gentleman of the name of Graham? Can't

say I do, ma'am, really. But we have so many coming and going, you see, in a house like this."

"Oh yes, to be sure; but still I thought that perhaps—I have reason to know that the gentleman came to this hotel."

"Oh! no doubt about that, ma'am—quite enough that you say so, of course. But you have no idea of the number of parties that come here, you haven't indeed," and the tone of the waiter's voice was positively compassionate.

"He was on his way out to India," persisted Olivia, hoping to assist her interlocutor's memory by details. "It was about the beginning of the month that he came—the 4th, it must have been."

The waiter considered very hard, but still shook his head.

"I don't know, I'm sure, ma'am. The name of Graham, did you say?"

"Yes. He can only have been with you two or three days, for he sailed on the 7th."

The waiter was evidently inclined to do his best, but still looked desponding.

"George, do you remember seeing the name of Graham on a gentleman's luggage any time this month?" he inquired of the subordinate at the fire-side.

The person addressed looked up from his sticks and reflected, apparently as much puzzled as his superior.

"The gentleman had no luggage," put in Mrs. Waters in eager correction. "He had left every thing behind him."

George drew a greasy sleeve across his forehead by way of brightening up his wits, and then said, tentatively:

"P'raps the lady means the gen'l'man as came one evening without any luggage, and said he was going to send for his things next day. That was this month, I think."

"Yes," said Mrs. Waters feverishly. "Tall, with dark hair and eyes?"

"I believe so," assented George thoughtfully. "And he said something about going to India, I know."

"Why, that was the gentleman that was taken ill, wasn't it?" said the head-waiter.

"Taken ill!" cried Olivia, with a pang of terror. "What do you mean?"

Mrs. Waters said nothing, but she turned pale and cold as marble.

"There was a gentleman taken very ill here some three or four weeks ago," explained the head-waiter, "just about the beginning of the month, as you say, ma'am. I don't know his name, really, but I'm pretty sure he was going to India—indeed I think when he came he said he had just been taking out his passage."

"He was ill, you say?" panted Olivia. "And what—where is he now? what—" She paused for breath, unable to frame her question more precisely.

"I couldn't say any thing for certain, ma'am. The doctor was fetched as soon as we found out, and I believe he said it was something very bad, fever or something like that, for Mrs. Petchley had him moved out of the house directly—in case it should be catching, you know, and I dare say it was, for he was quite out of his mind, talking all sorts of things."

"And now?" articulated Olivia. It was all she could say, but her manner sufficiently showed the intensity of her interest.

"I am sorry to say I don't know, ma'am," was the deprecating answer. "I remember hearing a day or two afterwards that he was very ill, but there is so much to think of in this house, you see, that really— Would you like to speak to Mrs. Petchley about it?"

With difficulty Olivia made a gesture of assent.

"Go and ask Mrs. Petchley to step this way a minute, George," commanded the head-waiter, whose curiosity was by this time so far roused that he was unwilling to absent himself just as a crisis seemed to be approaching.

George left the room, and the head-waiter, perceiving that the ladies were both too much agitated to address him, and yet feeling it necessary as an excuse for his remaining that something should be said, went on:

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, ladies, to have mentioned any thing to make you uneasy. But who knows, perhaps this is not the gentleman you were inquiring about, after all. We will hope it was some one else who was taken ill, and I dare say it may have been."

"Tell us something more," said Olivia faintly. "You remember him, I suppose?"

"Oh yes! I remember him quite well, now that I come to think. He was a tall dark gentleman just as you say, and I recollect noticing at the time that he seemed rather strange in his manner—as if he couldn't properly fix his thoughts down to any thing, as it were."

"Go on. Did he say nothing about where he had come from—nothing about his friends?"

"Nothing at all, ma'am, I am quite certain. He seemed to be very anxious about some letters that he wanted to write, for I remember him calling for pen and paper in a great hurry. But he didn't seem to do much with it when he got it; I was in the coffee-room most of the evening, and there he was, sitting with the pen in his hand, looking first one way and then another, and never making a stroke, for what I could see. And at last he got up and pushed every thing away from him, just as if he couldn't try longer. I remember thinking to myself how tired he looked, and you see the fever must have been coming on at that very time, for it was only next morning we found him with his head so bad."

"You are quite sure, then, that he did not send away any letter?" said Olivia, thinking of the packet which she had received from her lover next day, and half hoping that the person spoken of by the waiter might not be he after all.

"Well, there was something or other he put in the post before going to bed, I think, for I recollect he asked very particularly where the post-office was, and would go out himself, though I offered to send. But I couldn't say if it was a letter exactly—I think it was more a little parcel or such like, for I noticed him doing up something very careful in a bit of paper; it went through my head that perhaps his luggage was locked up and he was sending the key for it."

Olivia was silent, but she felt her heart turn cold with dismay. Then it had been really he!

"These are all the circumstances I can call to mind just now, ma'am," continued the waiter meditatively, for he saw how much interested his listeners were, and wished to do his best to deserve well of them. "It is only a wonder I took so much notice as I did; but I was struck with

the poor gentleman looking so ill, and was of course particularly anxious to do all in my power to make him comfortable. And I can assure you, ladies, the care I took of him until Mrs. Petchley had him removed— Oh! here is Mrs. Petchley."

A rustling was heard on the landing and immediately afterwards the lady in moire antique sailed into the room, with something in her manner which, if not exactly defiant, was at least calculated to suggest that she was prepared to stand very jealously on the defensive.

"I understand you have been making inquiries about a gentleman who came to this house some time ago suffering from an attack of fever," she said as she entered, speaking before there was time for any one to anticipate her.

"What have you done with him?" asked Olivia in an unsteady voice. "Where—" and she stopped, absolutely afraid of going on.

"I am very glad indeed to have an opportunity of seeing somebody belonging to him," was the reply, given with a great deal of dignified composure. "The expenses incurred have of course been very considerable, and as we have only had a few pounds which we found in his purse to meet them—"

"Why can you not tell me something?" interrupted Olivia impetuously. "Is he better? is he worse? why don't you tell me?"

"I really scarcely know how he may be at present," said the lady, drawing herself up with majestic resentment of this vehemence. "When last I heard I believe he was still considered in danger, but probably if any thing had happened—"

"Where is he?" demanded Olivia peremptorily. She felt partially relieved of her worst fears, but for that very reason was more eagerly impatient than ever.

"I had him removed to lodgings in the neighborhood immediately on finding what was the matter—of course, in prudence, I could do nothing else. And as I was saying, I am very glad to see some one connected with him, for there was not more than thirty pounds or so in his purse, and the expenses—"

"The expenses would not have been grudged if they had been thirty times thirty pounds. Where is he? what is the address?"

"I am certain he has been paid every attention to," said Mrs. Petchley, more deferentially than she had yet spoken. "They are very respectable lodgings, and I gave particular directions that every care should be taken."

"Where is he?" repeated Olivia, trembling with impatience.

"21 Clark's Buildings is the address," answered the landlady, a little reluctantly. "Shall we send to see how the gentleman is going on, ma'am?"

"No, we will go ourselves," returned Olivia decisively, and she went up to offer her hand to Mrs. Waters, who, faint with agitation and alarm, had sat listening to what was being said, almost bereft of the power of moving. "Come, Agnes, let us make haste."

"Call a fly for the ladies directly," said the hostess, and then, turning toward her guests as the waiter departed on his errand, she added in tones almost of apology: "I am very sorry not to be able to give you any more positive information,

but lately I have been so busy that really I have had no time—in an establishment like this, you know— But if any thing serious had happened the woman of the house would have been sure to tell me. What, will you not sit down a moment till the fly comes?”

Olivia made no answer, and, holding her friend's arm pressed tightly to her side, passed out of the room without vouchsafing another look at the magnificent landlady. On reaching the bottom of the stairs they found a fly already at the door, and in another minute they were once more on their way through the rain and the darkness; this time, however, in a state of suspense which, though hope was largely mixed with their fear, was perhaps harder to bear than any they had suffered yet. They were about to hear definitive tidings at last, but of what kind would those tidings be?

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### FOUND.

AFTER a few minutes of mute suspense, during which nothing was heard save the rattle of wheels over the stones of ill-paved streets, the two friends found themselves entering a straight dimly-lighted lane, formed by a high dead wall on one side and a row of shabby one-storied dwellings on the other. This was the row known as Clark's Buildings, and, after some trouble in finding the right house, the driver pulled up in front of No. 21, a shabby one-storied dwelling like the rest, with nothing except the fact of its being No. 21 to distinguish it from its neighbors. Here the ladies alighted, and after a little waiting were confronted by a hard-featured and somewhat angular-looking woman, who, presenting herself at the door with a candle in her hand, let its light fall on them as fully as possible, while she inquired with rather acid politeness what they pleased to want.

Mrs. Waters turned to Olivia, who had hitherto been spokeswoman. But Olivia now said nothing; at this decisive moment, when she was perhaps close to her lover, when certainly she was about to hear tidings of him, a sense of anxious dread, mingled at the same time with something not unlike shyness, had taken possession of her, and kept her from uttering a word. She looked appealingly at Mrs. Waters, who, finding herself compelled to speak for both, asked faintly:

“Is Mr. Graham here?”

“Mr. who?” said the woman sharply.

“Mr. Graham—a gentleman who was taken ill at Patchley's Hotel; they sent him to this house, did they not?”

“Oh! that's what you have come about?” said the woman, and perhaps because she was by this time favorably impressed by her scrutiny of the visitors' dress and appearance, perhaps because she considered their inquiry as constituting a sufficient introduction, she became a good deal more gracious. “Yes, this is the house, sure enough, and dreadfully ill he was, poor gentleman, I can tell you.”

“But he is better now?” said Mrs. Waters, and she asked the question as beseechingly as though the answer she was to hear depended on the will of her interlocutor.

“Oh yes! he is better now and doing nicely. But the trouble we have had—you wouldn't believe it hardly. I thought at one time we never could have brought him through.”

For some seconds neither of the two friends was able to speak; the revulsion from fear to joy was almost more than they could bear. And even when Olivia began to recover breath after the first shock of gladness, she was still tongue-tied. The tormenting dread was gone; but that peculiar sensation of shyness remained, and had increased tenfold.

“Where is he?” said Mrs. Waters at length.

“Where? Why, in his own room, to be sure, up stairs. Bless you, if you had seen how ill he was, you wouldn't think of him being anywhere else yet a while. He has got up for a bit this evening, to write some letter he was worrying about, but it's the first time he has been out of bed at all.”

Again there was an interval of silence, and then, in a wavering voice, Mrs. Waters asked:

“Do you think we might see him?”

“Well, I should think so; but I'll go and ask, if you like. Who shall I say it is, ma'am?”

“Say that Mrs. Waters and— No, say nothing about the other lady; I will tell him that myself. Say that Mrs. Waters wants to see him—and mind, nothing just now about any one else.”

“Yes, ma'am. I shall be sure to do it right.”

So saying the woman passed up stairs, and the friends were again alone. Mrs. Waters looked at Olivia, and seeing how violently she was agitated, could not but feel some apprehension as to the effect of the coming meeting upon her brother.

“He must not know you are here at first; I will break it to him gradually. You can come up stairs with me, but you must wait outside till I call you. Do you understand?”

Olivia made a sign of assent; she was not able to do more. Just then the woman came down stairs.

“Oh yes! he will see you; it has put him quite in a flurry only to hear the name. The front bedroom door, right before you as you get to the top; but won't you let me show you up?”

“There is no need,” said Mrs. Waters, abruptly passing towards the staircase. It was evident from her manner that she wished to dispense with the proffered service, and, after a brief hesitation between natural curiosity and a desire of pleasing people who seemed to be worth pleasing, the woman acquiesced, and slowly retreated towards the kitchen.

Meanwhile Mrs. Waters made her way up the narrow carpetless stairs. Olivia followed close behind, quivering with expectation in every nerve, and yet in a kind of dream all the time.

The door at the top of the stairs was standing ajar, so that, though nothing could be seen of the room itself, a dim yellow ray from within shone on the landing, yet further increasing the intensity of Olivia's expectation. Mrs. Waters made a motion to her to remain where she was, and then, pushing open the door gently, entered the room. For an instant Olivia had a vision of a barely-furnished chamber, with a figure that she knew sitting at a table in the midst; but before she was able to discern more through the haze that rose half-blinding to her eyes, the door again swung upon its hinges, and she once more



found herself in outer darkness, with only that dim yellow ray to light it up.

"Agnes!" said a voice within, and the sound of that voice, broken and feeble though it was, sent such a thrill through Olivia's veins that she could scarcely stand.

"Harry! my brother! my own Harry!" cried Mrs. Waters, and then there was a confused sound of sobs and kisses, and the listener knew that the sister had fallen weeping into the brother's arms.

For some time no word was spoken in the room, but at length the sister's voice was heard, half drowned in tears.

"I never thought to see you again, Harry. When you did not write I was afraid—ah! you may think what I was afraid of. Oh! what I have suffered! but it is all made up at last."

"My poor dear Agnes! but I could not help it. I have been ill, very ill; this is the first day— And see, I was writing to you now."

"You were! Ah! I knew you could not forget me—I knew it. And it was that which made me so miserable, when I waited and waited, and no letter came."

"It was not my fault. I tried to write to you that night, but could not; the thoughts would not come—except one thought that was driving me mad. There, that will do; it will drive me mad again if I let it come back. How have you found me? What brought you down to this place—not to look for me, surely?"

"Ah! Harry, what else should it be? We knew you had gone to Southampton, and we came down—I came down, that is—to see if I could find you, and I went to the hotel where you had been, and the people sent us here—sent me here. And oh! to have found you—I hardly know how to bear the joy of it."

"Agnes! my own Agnes! how you love me! I did not know there was any one in the world to care for me so; it makes life easier to bear to find that there is one—yes, though only one."

The last words were spoken in a low tremulous voice which made Olivia's heart ache to the very core. A wild impulse rose up within her to rush forward and tell him that he was mistaken—an impulse which was only with difficulty repressed, and not so much by the sense of shyness which had helped to keep her silent a while ago, as by the fear of harming him by showing herself too suddenly.

There was a pause, during which Olivia was conscious of a feeling of impatience which almost amounted to anger. How dared his sister hear him speak such words and not instantly undeceive him?

But perhaps Mrs. Waters had only been considering the best way of undeceiving him, for presently she said:

"Not only one, dear Harry, do not say that. But indeed you would not, if you knew who has been helping me to find you."

Olivia held her breath to listen for the question which she expected that those words must elicit. But apparently he was too indifferent on the subject to care about following it up, for after some moments of silence Mrs. Waters spoke again.

"Who do you think it was that helped me, dear?"

"Austin, I suppose; it was very good of him."

"No, not Austin," and the answer was made with something like a sigh. "No, it was somebody else; can you not guess?"

"How should I guess?" he said, but his voice had all at once become very hoarse. "Who was it?"

"I think you might guess if you tried, Harry."

"Who was it?"

"Ah! surely you know now who I mean. It was Olivia."

"Olivia!" he ejaculated, with a cry so full of pain that the listener had again to make a struggle to restrain herself.

"Yes, Olivia; I went to ask her if she knew where you had gone, and—"

"You went to ask her!" he cried reproachfully.

"You dared to go before her with my name in your mouth! you dared— Oh! it was cruel, cruel! When all I prayed for was to be forgotten by her!"

His voice was that of a man racked with shame and anguish. Olivia heard and suffered scarcely less than he; but still with an effort she kept silence, and strained her ears to listen for what her friend might answer.

"You could not be forgotten by her," she heard Mrs. Waters say, and inwardly blessed her for the words. "She loves you too well to forget you, be sure of that."

"Loves me!" he echoed, "thinking of me what she thinks!" And he laughed a laugh of such supreme bitterness that Olivia might not have been able to abstain from throwing herself at his feet to implore pardon, if Mrs. Waters, alarmed by the excess of his agitation, had not made haste to reply:

"She does not think what you mean; she knows better now; she knows the whole truth. Yes, Harry, the whole truth, and she loves you with all her heart and soul."

There was a sound of convulsive breathing, and then, in a low preternaturally composed voice, he answered:

"I know what it is—the fever coming back. I have sometimes dreamed of this before—when I was ill; and I understand now what it means—I will not let myself be disappointed."

"Harry, no, you are in your perfect mind, and what I say is real, I swear it to you. Olivia knows every thing; she loves you better even than before, and if you will not believe me, she shall tell you so herself."

"Tell me herself! Ah! now I know that I am dreaming."

"You are not dreaming; she has come with me—it was she that found you, not I. She is here now—in this town—almost close at hand—within call. Yes, Harry, she is in this very house."

A moment of dead silence followed, and then his voice broke out, confused and almost inarticulate with excitement.

"Is it true? can it really— Take care, take care—if you have deceived me, I must die."

"I have not deceived you; she shall come herself and show you that I have not. Olivia!"

Olivia laid her shaking hand on the door and pushed it slowly open—slowly, for the nervous shyness had come back, and she who just before had hardly been able to keep herself from falling at her lover's feet, had now scarcely courage to drag herself into his presence. And even when

the door was open she still paused trembling on the threshold, knowing that his eyes were upon her, yet at first not daring to raise hers to confront them.

"Olivia!" she heard him whisper.

She glanced up, and for an instant her look met that of those eyes whose light she remembered so well. He was too feeble to rise from his chair, but held out his arms towards her. The sight of that mute invitation was enough; with all hesitation cast aside, she flung herself on her knees before him, and was drawn passionately to his heart.

It was long before either spoke; there was no need of words even if words could have been found. At last Olivia felt the clasp which had held her so tightly partially relaxed, but it was not that she was to be yet liberated, only that she was to be more attentively contemplated than she had been hitherto. As she found how intently she was observed, she looked up with a smile half-bright, half-deprecating, and then discovered, somewhat to her relief, that they were alone in the room. Mrs. Waters had slipped out unperceived.

"And you are really mine again—really mine," he said, gazing into her face the while with a look of unspeakable tenderness, and smoothing the tangled hair away from her forehead, as though to convince himself by touch as well as by sight.

"If you will let me," she murmured, lowering her eyes again. "If you can only forgive me."

"Forgive you! you mean if you can forgive me. For I know how I wronged you, Olivia—I felt it at the time, and I have felt it more than ever since. With such disgrace on my name, to dare— I hate myself when I think of it."

"Harry! Harry! how can you speak so?"

"I speak what is true—I hate myself when I remember. But I loved you so, I could not give you up. And then I had promised never to say any thing to clear myself—I could not do that either. To clear myself I must have accused him, and I had given him my word that he was safe."

"I know, I know, dear Harry, and you were right to keep it. And I will help you to keep it still; helping you in every thing shall be my glory."

A strange shadow passed over his face.

"To keep it still! then does not every body—How did you find out?"

"Your sister told me; I had a right to be told, had I not? And I promised that I would always keep the secret until you gave me leave to tell it; I promised that to her, and now I promise it to you."

A sound like a groan escaped him as she spoke. "You are the only one, then? I thought I was cleared before all the world. There, let it be," and here she felt his arm withdrawn from her waist. "Oh! why did you come back to me?"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Harry, dear Harry, what is the matter? You are sorry that this cloud still rests on you? Then it shall rest on you no longer. I will proclaim the truth to every one who has heard the lie."

"No!" he exclaimed, and caught her arm with sudden energy, as though to hold her back.

"I am free to do it if I like, remember. It was not your sister who told me so much as it was I who found out, and I warned her that I would not be silent unless you wished it. And if you do not wish it—"

"But I do, I do; I promised, and it must be. My poor Agnes—I could not—after all these years—"

"It would go very hardly with her, I know; and as for her husband, she says it would kill him, and very likely it would; and then poor Emmy— But still, for your sake—"

"For my sake; no. If you have ever cared for me, don't try to tempt me."

"You are quite resolved, then? Ah! I knew you would be. And I will not say but that you are right, Harry; you do not wish to make your sacrifice vain, and I think in your place I should not wish it either. And it shall not be made vain by me, dear; it is the business of my life to help and not to thwart you."

She crept nearer to him saying thus, and tried to lay her cheek against his hand. But he shrank away from her almost as though he feared her touch.

"No, leave me—I can not. Leave me, I say—now—or the parting will drive me mad."

"The parting? and why the parting? I thought we were never to part more."

"We must. I was weak once, but I will not be weak again. Yes, we must part; you shall not be dragged down by me."

She had half-looked for some such opposition on his part, so was not surprised, but only set herself with resolute love to overcome it.

"You must let me be the judge of that, Harry. And if what you call dragging me down I call raising me up, you will not refuse to raise me up, surely?"

He shook his head, and as she pressed closer to his side only made an effort to thrust her away.

"I am disgraced—disgraced before the eyes of all the world. I will not have you disgraced too."

"You are not disgraced, Harry, and if you were I should only be more determined to share unjust disgrace along with you. But you are not disgraced; your secret has been kept, and in the eyes of the world you are still Henry Graham, as you used to be."

"No, leave me; I will not be shaken. It is enough that I am not Henry Graham, enough that my real name is one I must be ashamed of. And besides, it is known who I am. How did you come to know yourself—that letter which you showed me—"

He paused with a shudder.

"Yes, he knows—my cousin Randal—but no one else, I am certain; he found out by his own cunning, for his own purposes, but for his own purposes he has chosen not to make his discovery public. And I shall find a way to make him choose so still."

"What! and do you think that even if only one man knows me to be Harold Maxwell, I would let you stoop to be Harold Maxwell's wife? What do you take me for?"

Again he tried to put her away from him, but she only clung the closer.

"If all the world knew instead of only one man, I would bear what the world might say of

me with pride and pleasure. But I will take care—not for my own sake, though; only for yours—I will take care that the world shall not know. Randal shall have Egerton Park—that would bribe him to greater things than keeping a secret for us; and we will go to India, or Australia, or an English village, or wherever you please, and be happy together all our lives long.”

She raised her glistening lashes to see the effect of her persuasion. His lips were quivering with such evident emotion that she hoped he was about to yield; but when he saw her looking he made a perceptible effort at self-composure, and presently answered, in a voice so cold and formal and constrained, that it scarcely seemed his voice at all:

“You are very good. I thank you very much for the sacrifice you would make—as much as if I were willing to accept it. But I am not so selfish as you think me.”

“Ah! Harry, how can you speak of sacrifice? Do you not know that the only sacrifice which it would cost me any thing to make would be of your love, of your approval—of you? Ah! to lose you would be like losing air and sunshine; but to give up all the parks and fine houses in the world— If only you will not reject me for being poor,” she added, smiling through her tears.

“Oh! if you were! if you only were!” He stretched out his arms for an instant, as though to fold them round her, but stopped himself, and waved her wildly away.

“What! you would drive me from you, you would send me out into the world by myself to be miserable when I might be the happiest of all creatures under the sun? You pretend that it is because you will not let me make a sacrifice, but that is not the reason; it is because you will not make a sacrifice—a sacrifice of your cold, cruel pride. Oh! Harry, and you say you are not selfish!”

She looked up yet again. This time his face was turned rigidly away, so that she could only see that it was perfectly pale and colorless.

“You will not even look at me? You are quite determined to cast me off, quite determined that I shall be lonely and miserable—and rich? Quite determined—yes, I see you are. Then, Harry, I will tell you something, and, remember, I am quite determined too. I will not be miserable and rich, at all events—I will not be mocked by my own money. Randal shall have Egerton Park in any case, and if you will not give me a home I will turn governess again. Well, you see how poor I shall be without you to help me—will you not have pity?”

Still he did not turn his head.

“I see how it is, you do not believe me, but I never was more resolved in my life. Egerton Park has been a burden to me ever since I had it, and if I am to be turned away by you because I have the misfortune to possess it I shall abhor its very name. I will give it up, and if you choose to let me live poor and deserted and unhappy, why, so let it be. But I do not think you will be so unkind.”

She thought she saw him tremble, and, putting her hand on his timidly yet tenderly, she went on with caressing entreaty:

“Ah yes! Harry, you love me still a little—a very little, but too well to cast me out to be mis-

erable even though you try. When I ask you not to reject me, you will not reject me, will you?”

He turned a momentary look on her beseeching face, then with sudden passion fell forward on her neck, exclaiming:

“I can not! God forgive me, I have not the strength!”

He strained her to his heart, and for a while every thing was forgotten by those two save that each loved and was loved again. It would have been long before Olivia remembered any thing else; but, on lifting her eyes to her lover's face, a bitter expression which she saw there reminded her that to his happiness, if not to hers, there still existed a drawback.

“Oh the wrong I am doing you!” he cried remorsefully, as his glance caught hers, “the wrong you have made me do you! How shall I endure the shame of it?”

“A wrong! do you call it a wrong to give me cause to be so proud and happy? What do you mean by such a word?”

“But it is a wrong—a cruel wrong, and I know it, though that only makes it the greater. That you should be the wife of a disgraced man, and that I should suffer it!”

“How dare you, Harry? Disgraced! your only fault is that I must look up to you too much.”

“I know what I am—a disgraced man. But oh! I never looked to feel my disgrace as I do now; and yet I thought that I felt it enough too.”

“Ah! Harry, how little you must care for me! Why, I feel all my sorrows lighter, with you to share them.”

“If it was only sorrow! but it is shame which you must share with me—shame. Ah! how could I submit to have it fastened on me?”

“Do not repent your own generosity, dear.”

“But I do repent—I can not help it. No man has the right to part with his own good name as I have done. I thought at the time I should be the only sufferer, but see how I was mistaken!”

“I am not a sufferer, Harry.”

“Oh! if I could have foreseen! But I did not know at first what I was doing—I thought I was only keeping another man's secret for him. I was a fool, but I do not think I could have deliberately let myself be dishonored.”

“My own love, what need to excuse yourself to me?”

“And then, when I found what I had done—it seemed so hard to come forward and speak words that would ruin my poor sister and her family—and Austin who had once been so good to me—after they thought themselves saved—I could not do it.”

“I could not have done it either, I am sure. Dear Harry, all that you speak of is done, and can not be undone—why not forget it?”

“Forget it! There are some things that can not be forgotten.”

“Ah! but for my sake this must be forgotten. You belong to me now, and you owe it to me to remember nothing except that. Oh! Harry, my own Harry, why do you look so? When I could be so entirely happy, it is cruel of you not to be entirely happy too.”

“Entirely happy!”

“Yes. Can you not be happy with me to love you, Harry?”

"Can I not? Ah! how can I help it?" he murmured, and drew her close and closer to himself.

When next she looked into his face she was almost satisfied. A trace of bitterness was indeed still visible—and she felt with a pang that nothing she might say could quite remove it—but it was mingled with such a look of rapturous tenderness as made her sure that regret for the past could not wholly mar what would otherwise have been the perfect happiness of the present, and with this assurance she was fain to rest content.

## CHAPTER XL.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

MEANWHILE the time of Mrs. Waters's absence was passing very heavily and drearily at the Laurels, where Emmy and her father, though carefully avoiding all mention to each other of the real cause of their uneasiness, were almost equally low-spirited and out of sorts. It has been seen that Anstin had been left by his wife in no enviable frame of mind, and, miserable and self-tormented as he was, Emmy was scarcely less so. She knew the nature of the business which took the two fellow-travellers to Southampton, Mrs. Waters having exchanged a few words with her during the hurried preparations for departure; and not only was it this additional proof of her mother's anxiety which grieved and depressed her, but the suspicion, now amounting in her mind to certainty, that for that anxiety she alone was responsible. As has been shown, she had been terribly afraid of this before, and now all further doubt was rendered impossible by a discovery which she had that day contrived to make.

"Did—did Miss Egerton—when you were with her just now—did she say nothing about how she had found out?" Emmy had ventured to inquire, while she was assisting her mother to put a few things together for her journey.

"Nothing. She did not tell me, and I never thought of asking."

"I think it must have been as I said before," Emmy rejoined, a good deal relieved by the answer. "He—Uncle Harold, you know—he must have confessed it himself; I always thought that must have been the way of it. Oh yes! of course he must; she never could have forgiven him, as you say she has, if she had found it out through any body else."

"You understand nothing about it," replied her mother, rather impatiently. "And she did find out through somebody else—I remember now—she spoke something about the person who had told her—some man it must have been, by what she said. But I will ask her another time."

Emmy said nothing more, but her heart sank within her as though it could never beat lightly again. So it was she who had worked the mischief, after all—she who had been the cause of her uncle's despair, perhaps his death—of her mother's sorrow and suspense. That man had betrayed her, there could be no doubt.

That day was the most wretched she had ever spent. She let her mother go without making any confession of her fault—how should she ever find courage to confess a fault so terrible? But the sense of forced isolation increased the bitter-

ness of her remorseful misery tenfold. She could do nothing but brood over her treason, and the steps by which she had been led to it—going through all the circumstances of the time with a minuteness of detail which cost her a very agony of shame. To think of the man despising her and laughing at her all the time he was leading her on—Ah! how she hated him! and yet, if possible, she hated herself almost more for having been so degraded by him—degraded so that she could never know self-respect again. And to think what she might have been if she had chosen—what indeed she had been only a little while ago—adored and idolized by John Thwaites, John Thwaites whom she now felt that she could lay down her life only to have a tender look from. But she need never hope to have a tender look from him again—never any thing save coldness and contempt; he had made a mistake in her, and now he had found it out. Ah! how he must have despised her that night at the ball—that night when she had thought herself so triumphant; no wonder, indeed, he had sent back the ribbon. And if he could only guess the full measure of her baseness—why, he would be ashamed of himself almost for ever having cared for her. Ah yes! it was all, all over now.

Thus, shut up in her own room, she pondered miserably till it was time to join her father at dinner. But when that time came, she did not find herself more cheerful in his company than she had been alone. There never was a meal, surely, more dreary than that dinner, with the long white table formally laid out in centre dishes and side dishes (for not a jot of accustomed grandeur was abated), and Emmy and her father, a great way off from one another, presiding in dismal dignity at the opposite ends, watched over by the two white-headed footmen, who hovered round with noiseless tread, vying with each other in decorous stolidity of countenance and apparent unconsciousness that any thing was wrong. There was little said by either father or daughter during dinner, and that little consisted of mere commonplace conventionalisms, spoken more to impose upon the footmen than for any thing else. But the footmen, with all their apparent unconsciousness, were not imposed upon a bit; and, though perhaps imagining that financial causes had more to do with it than was really the case, were just as well aware of the despondency of their superiors as those superiors themselves.

It was not much of a relief even when the footmen went away and the pair were left alone at dessert. Neither was inclined for talking, and yet, now that they were by themselves, it seemed necessary to say something, and something not so absolutely dry and artificial as the little remarks which had sufficed hitherto.

"How dull we seem to be without mamma!" began Emmy, after a few minutes of oppressive silence.

"Dull! yes, dull enough in all conscience," assented her father, pouring some brandy into his glass as he spoke, with so unsteady a hand that part of it overflowed. "But she doesn't care about that, so long—Did she tell you what she was going away for?"

"Something about Miss Egerton and Mr. Graham—to help her to look for him, was it not?" said Emmy nervously, for she was not sure how

far her knowledge might be known or approved of by her father.

"Yes, that's just it—a most absurd thing, to be sure. An utter stranger—a man we know hardly any thing of, at least; and the idea of going to look for him—just because he has quarrelled with Miss Egerton and has chosen to take himself off. I think Miss Egerton might have taken the trouble for herself, without disturbing people who have nothing to do with him."

Emmy saw her father's solicitude that she should not suspect in what relation Mr. Graham really stood to them, and answered cautiously:

"Miss Egerton has always been so friendly with us—I suppose she thought that for her sake we shouldn't mind, and of course mamma's company must be a great comfort. I do hope they will find him; do you think they will, papa?"

"I don't know; I—that is, I think nothing about it." He drank off his brandy, and then went on with a more assured manner: "Except that I think them fools, to go wasting their time about a man who may be dead and buried weeks ago for what they can tell."

"Oh! papa!" said Emmy faintly. "But you don't really think he is, do you?"

"Well, if he isn't, why has he never written? to—to any of his friends here, you know. And then his luggage at the inn—why did he never send for it? And if it is true he went to Southampton, as they seem to think—he would need his things all the more if he was going out of the country, wouldn't he? If he isn't dead, I don't see what can have become of him—that's all."

"Oh! surely, papa—" faltered Emmy. "There are so many other things that might have happened; surely it is not likely that—that—" and she stopped, her breath almost taken away by terror.

"What! and so you think they will find him, eh?"

"Oh yes! I do—indeed I do; I can not think any thing else."

"You and I differ, then," responded Austin sharply, and he poured out another glass of brandy, and tossed it down with as much energy as though he were drinking a toast.

"Oh! papa, it would be so dreadful!" said Emmy, half entreatingly.

"Dreadful! Oh yes! very dreadful of course. But whatever happens it won't be my fault, so I don't see why I should make a fuss about it."

There was a kind of fierceness in his manner which almost shocked her, giving her as it did the idea that he felt not only indifference, but strong dislike, to the person whom he was speaking of, and who, as she could not help remembering, was his own brother-in-law. But presently she bethought herself what a burden and disgrace that brother-in-law had from the first been to him and his, and understood that his feelings under such circumstances might not be unnatural.

"He has brought it all on his own head," querulously went on Austin, perhaps conscious that his bitterness required some explanation. "Why did he come over to England, first of all? could he not have staid where he was well off? And what business had he to make up to Miss Egerton?—when he could not keep himself from quarrelling with her afterwards, I mean; he might have known how it would turn out. And because he has chosen to put his head into the lion's

mouth, I have got to suffer for it—all this worry, you know. I say it is very hard."

For an instant Emmy, thinking of all that she, no less than her father, was suffering by her uncle's means, could not help agreeing in her own mind that it really was rather hard. But then immediately afterwards she remembered the share which her own imprudence had contributed to the result, and her heart was wrung anew with remorse and self-reproach.

"Ah! but they will find him!" she cried in passionate sorrow; "I hope they will—I hope! Oh! if they did not, what—I should be so unhappy!"

"You are a fool!" said Austin angrily.

He refilled his glass once more, and swallowed the contents at a single draught. He was not accustomed to drink quite so deeply—not at least at that hour of the day—but his unwonted indulgence did not seem just now specially to affect him. His hand was tremulous and unsteady, but not more so than it had been when first he sat down to dinner; and instead of looking flushed and heated, as towards evening he not unfrequently did in these times, he was singularly wan and haggard, with no trace of color in his face save a faint red spot on either cheek. Emmy, already struck by the unusual harshness of his manner, was quite concerned as she observed him more particularly, and noticed how pale and suffering he appeared—so much concerned, that for a moment her anxiety for her uncle's safety was forgotten in a new solicitude.

"You are not fretting yourself about money, I hope, papa dear?" she asked timidly. "After what Mr. Podmore has said, it would be such nonsense to worry about it any more, you know."

"Nonsense? of course it would, ridiculous nonsense—do you think I don't know that just as well as you can tell me? Why, as for money, I never was in better spirits in my life. Podmore himself says I am all safe, and you may clap on two or three hundred per cent. to any thing that Podmore says. Oh yes! I shall be the richest man in the county yet, see if I shan't—if only I am let alone," he added, with a sudden gnashing of the teeth and clenching of the hands that quite frightened poor Emmy again.

"Oh, papa! But it is quite certain you are to be let alone, is it not? I thought Mr. Podmore had arranged that with the different people already."

"Oh! yes, yes, of course. And so you think they will find him, do you?"

Emmy hardly knew at first of whom he was speaking, but recollected herself in time to answer:

"What! Mr. Graham? Oh yes! I think so surely. It might be a little while first, but sooner or later—I can not doubt it."

"Can you not? Then I do."

Emmy was silent with astonishment. Could it be anxiety for his brother-in-law's fate which agitated her father so strangely? The topic was evidently very prominent in his mind, and even the fact of his taking so desponding a view in itself argued a more than ordinary interest. She felt the weight of her responsibility increased, if possible, still further.

"Will you come into the drawing-room, papa?" she said presently, by way of changing

the subject. "Tea will be ready by this time, I should think."

"I can not come to tea. I am going to be busy in the library."

"Busy again, papa! Why, you have been busy all day long. Wouldn't you like to come and have a little music?"

"No, no—no music to-night. I have something else to think of. Run away into the drawing-room by yourself, and don't worry me."

Emmy was not altogether sorry at the prospect of spending the evening alone; she felt that the effort of entertaining her father would have been almost too much for her under the circumstances. Still for his sake she made yet another endeavor to coax him into the drawing-room, but he would not come, and she had nothing for it but reluctantly to turn away.

"What will you bet that they find him?" Austin asked as she was leaving the room.

Emmy's heart was too full to let her answer. How sure her father seemed to be that there was no hope! And if there was no hope, how should she bear it?

That evening, for Emmy, as she sat in solitary grandeur in the drawing-room, was even more wretched than the day had been. She could make no attempt to distract her thoughts by books or work, could only sit and listen-dismally to the wild gusts of wind that howled in the chimney, and the torrents of rain that every now and then rushed against the windows—brooding over her grief and her remorse. For the first time her mind was possessed by serious apprehension that her uncle might be really lost; with all her natural hopefulness, she could not help fearing the worst on finding that her father regarded it as so probable. And if it was so—if by her means her mother's brother had received his death-blow—ah! what should she do? how should she ever hold up her head again? And there would be none to comfort or sympathize, none to be her friend. Her father and mother would hate her and cast her off, and there was no one else now. There had been once—yes, one who would have taken her to his heart and cherished her though all the world had looked coldly on her; but she had been unworthy of him, and had lost him—lost him beyond all hope of recovery. Ah! the poor, lonely, deserted creature that she was and ever must be!

She sat up rather later than usual that evening, not because she was not sufficiently miserable where she was, but because the firelight and lamplight seemed after a fashion to keep her company, and she shrank from exchanging them for the dark solitude of her chamber. At last her watch told her that she had no pretext for farther delay, and very unwillingly she took up her candle and prepared to retire for the night.

On leaving the drawing-room she paused a few seconds outside the library door. She was always accustomed to say good-night to her father before going to bed, and could not make an exception now, though, if there had been an excuse for doing so, she would gladly have availed herself of it. But there was none, so after a slight hesitation she tapped at the door. She was not wont to observe any such formality, but this evening she had a kind of instinct that her father might not like to be broken in upon without

warning. And yet she might have known that he was not then at his desk, for there was a regularly-recurring creak of footsteps from within which showed that somebody was pacing up and down the room.

"Come in," said her father's voice, and the sound of footsteps abruptly ceased.

She entered. He was standing in the middle of the room, with his face, still very pale, turned eagerly towards the door.

"Is that you at last? Why, I thought you were never going to bed. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing particular," stammered Emmy. "I was coming to say good-night now."

"Good-night! high time to say good-night, indeed. Why, it is nearly twelve."

"I shall soon be in bed now. I hope you are not going to be late yourself, papa. Have you finished your writing?"

She glanced at his desk. But it was close shut, and the table showed no signs of writing, finished or unfinished.

"My writing! Oh! of course—yes, very nearly. Have the servants gone to bed?"

"I don't know, really. Not without seeing first if we wanted any thing, I should think."

"Tell them we want nothing—tell them to go directly. Now mind you do; it is quite ridiculous they should sit up so late when there is no need."

"I will if you like, papa, but I don't suppose they care. Well, I will say good-night now."

"Good-night, child. No, stop one minute; I want to ask you—it has just occurred to me—did you ever see—somewhere among your mother's things—not that it matters much of course—a—an old desk—a—a writing-case it was, I think?"

"There is the desk mamma always uses, you know," said Emmy, looking puzzled.

"No, no, not that one. An old thing she keeps locked up somewhere—because she thinks it so shabby, I suppose—it can't be for any thing else. Come, you must have seen it, I'm sure."

"I don't think I have, papa, I don't really."

"Nonsense! you have; I am sure you have. Damn it, I tell you I know you have," he burst out angrily, as Emmy still shook her head.

"At least I don't mean exactly that, of course, but I am sure, quite sure. Only think a little, and you will soon remember."

Emmy did think, and a ray of recollection presently dawned upon her.

"Oh yes! to be sure—I remember quite well. A brown leather writing-case—but it didn't look so very shabby either; I recollect asking mamma where she had bought it. Oh yes! I remember now—it was the day before we went to Nidbourne."

"And—and where is it? Where did you see it?"

"It was in mamma's chest of drawers—the old one in your bedroom; she was packing up her things for moving. But I don't know if you can get at it to-night, papa. Is there any thing in it you want?"

"Any thing I want—what do you mean?—the idea! Well, perhaps there might be a memorandum or two that it would be a convenience to see; that's what made me ask—but it is of

no great consequence. And why shouldn't I get at it to-night? is it put in another place, then?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. No, I rather think not—I heard mamma say only the other day she had done nothing to that chest since coming back. But the drawers are always locked, and I expect mamma has got the keys with her. It doesn't matter much, I hope, papà?"

"Of course not—of course—haven't I said so already? And so she has taken away her keys, has she?"

"I suppose so; at least I have not seen any thing of them. Unless she has left them about by accident, or in the pocket of her dress. But you can surely wait a day or two."

"Wait! oh yes! wait a whole year, if you like; it was only a matter of curiosity. There, good-night; you are quite late enough already."

He stooped down and kissed the rosy mouth which she held up to him. As he did so, she was struck by the peculiar parched dryness of his lips. She put out her hand to feel his—it was burning.

"I am afraid you are quite feverish, papa dear," she said, still keeping hold of his hand while she looked at him with a great deal of affectionate concern. "You are certain you are not worrying about money, eh?"

"No, no, nothing about money, I promise you—that will come right enough. Why, haven't I told you already that Podmore has warranted—You may make your mind easy about that, quite easy. Yes, and about every thing else—I will take care—for you as well as for myself—poor dear child—I will take care. Keep up your spirits; every thing will go well."

He spoke more tenderly than usual, and stroked her head very caressingly. She nestled gratefully to his side, exclaiming:

"My own dear papà! I am so glad to hear you say so! Oh yes! every thing will go well, I am certain—every thing."

"Trust me for that. Now run up stairs to bed, and don't hinder me any longer."

"What! are you not going to bed too, then? I thought you had done your work for to-night."

"Oh yes! so I have, of course—I am going almost directly. Don't forget to see about the servants—I hate to have them sitting up to all hours of the night like this. There, that will do—good-night!"

"Good-night, dear, dear papà," said Emmy, with a parting kiss, "and thank you for all the comfort you have given me. Oh yes! I will keep up my spirits. I have been rather out of sorts to-day with mamma being away, but things will look brighter in the morning, I am sure."

She left her father with these words, and was presently alone in her own room for the night. But in spite of her promise to keep up her spirits, she did not succeed in feeling much more cheerful than she had done all day, being indeed, if possible, more depressed since her last interview with her father even than before. What he had said was doubtless in matter very reassuring, but there had been something in his manner—something so feverish and flighty and altogether unaccountable—which, almost unconsciously to herself, more than counterbalanced the consolation she might otherwise have felt. She tried very hard to hope for the best, but as she laid her head on the pillow that night she was still aware

of a dark cloud of foreboding hanging over her, which, strive as she would, she could not shake off.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

AUSTIN did not do any work down stairs after his daughter had left him, but neither did he go immediately to his bedroom as she had expected. For nearly half an hour he kept walking fretfully up and down in his library, biting his nails as though with ill-suppressed impatience, and every now and then stopping to look at his watch. At length, after returning it to his pocket for the tenth time at least, he wheeled round, and, instead of resuming his walk, went to the door and put out his head to listen.

All within the house was perfectly dark and still. The lights in the hall and staircase were all extinguished; and Austin, straining his ears for any slight sound of movement up stairs, heard nothing save the howling of the wind outside and an occasional rattle of the casements. Evidently the whole household was at rest.

He stepped back into the library, and took up his lamp. But it shook so in his hand that he laid it down again, and before going farther opened a cupboard in the wall where stood a bottle and glass. He filled the glass to the brim, and drank off its contents with avidity, then with steadier hand locked the cupboard, once more took up his lamp, and went softly out of the room.

Still softly he crept up stairs, and, reaching the door of his bedroom, noiselessly opened it. For a moment he glanced nervously round the spacious chamber, which, with its dark, distant corners, struck him as looking almost spectral in the dim lamp-light; then very gently he turned the key in the lock.

He did not fasten his door usually, but this time he was so particular to do so that he even took the trouble of looking to see if the key had really turned. There was another door communicating with his dressing-room, which he locked also, with the same precaution as the other; and then, looking once more round the room to make quite sure that he was alone, he drew a long breath of relief. It was satisfactory to feel that he was alone, and might remain alone during his own pleasure—free from the possibility of interference from the outer world. Nobody could interfere now except by his permission—unless indeed they broke open the door to get at him; and they would hardly dare to go so far as that, he thought to himself, and half smiled at the absurdity of his own fancies.

He advanced to a table in the middle of the room, and set down the lamp with a slight shiver.

He did not know how it was, but the room, which had always before seemed to him particularly comfortable and cheerful, did not look like itself this evening. Whether it was the sense of unaccustomed loneliness, or the angry gusts of wind which every now and then shook the window frames and even stirred the long folds of the closely-drawn curtains—what was the cause he could not have said, but somehow he felt almost afraid of looking about him. It would not do, however, to yield to such feelings, and with some-

thing of an effort he turned his head towards the corner where, as he knew, stood the old mahogany chest of drawers that had accompanied the family from their first home.

As he glanced at the familiar piece of furniture—the only piece of furniture in the room with which he had associations more than a few months old, and the aspect of which had hitherto seemed almost friendly to him in consequence—as he saw it now, it was with a strange shrinking feeling such as that with which one may look on a coffin or other object connected in the mind with half-ghastly, half-loathsome uses. Ah! if he had only known from the first what that chest contained, if he could have guessed what lay concealed from view behind that smooth polished front— But never mind; he knew now, and better late than never.

He went forward, trembling in every limb, and, kneeling down, tried each drawer in succession. But in vain; all the drawers were locked, and no amount of mere pulling or shaking could get them open. He rose and set himself to search the room for the keys.

He fumbled among his wife's things lying in different parts of the room—the combs and brushes and gloves and pins left out on the toilet-table, the veil and scarf tossed on the sofa, the morning-dress hanging on the door—all the mute evidences of her recent presence and hurried departure. He would rather not have touched them if he could have avoided it; every thing that was hers seemed so strangely imbued with her personality that he felt as though her eyes were following him all the time, and reproaching him for his purpose. But his purpose was too firmly fixed to be moved, and he went on with dogged defiance, shaking out shawls and handkerchiefs, and feeling pockets, and lifting knick-knacks—searching, indeed, thoroughly in every corner.

But with all his searching he could not find what he wanted.

Again he knelt down by the chest, and, taking out his own keys, tried one after another on the lock of each drawer. But although he found two or three that passed readily enough into the key-hole, there was not one that by his utmost force he could get to turn the lock; and after several minutes spent in fruitless labor he rose, wiping from his forehead the drops of cold perspiration that had gathered there. How that wretched wooden thing seemed endowed with stolid will to baffle him! But he would conquer—yes, he would conquer, if the shining mahogany had to be splintered first into match-wood.

He was unaccountably tremulous and out of breath with his exertions, and sat down to rest a little before renewing the attack.

What a great dismal vault the room looked, with only that little reading-lamp to light it! and then those long dark curtains swinging to and fro in the wind! How strong that wind was, to be sure—it made the very lamp flicker sometimes; and the howling—he had never heard wind howl so before; one would think human voices were crying and wailing and sobbing round the house. People long ago would have said that ghosts and witches were at work; and no wonder—if he believed in ghosts and witches he would say so himself. It was just the kind of night for evil things to come out of their hiding-

places and evil deeds to be done—a kind of night on which one might fancy a murder being committed.

A murder! he quite started at the idea. He had sometimes wondered how people felt when they were committing a murder, but he thought he understood now.

And yet why should he feel so? How foolish and inconsistent it was! He was doing no wrong, only looking for an old letter—a letter he had written himself, too, and was morally entitled to recover and destroy if he pleased. His wife had said it would be like treason to destroy it, but that was nonsense. Treason, forsooth—just because that man would be deprived of the means of exalting himself, and ruining every body else! And why should he not be deprived—why? What had he done that he was to be suffered to hold a knife to other people's throats through all eternity? He had done something, it was not to be denied, but nothing so prodigiously grand or self-sacrificing, after all. Any one not an absolute monster would have done the same for a sister and a sister's husband who had been so kind to him, and it was for the sister a great deal more than for the husband. And whatever he had done he had been abundantly thanked for—thanked at the time, and during years upon years during which he had been spoken of, and thought of, and prayed for, and looked up to as a kind of superior being.

The bondage and oppression and slavery of all those years!

Austin's whole spirit rose up in rebellion as he thought of how much the acceptance of that single obligation had cost him, tracing in his memory the entire course of his mental history ever since. What a perpetual phrasing about gratitude he had had to keep up, not to his wife merely, but to himself in the depth of his own consciousness! He had felt something just at first, probably, of what he had said, for he could remember that for a year or two after it happened he used to think how he should like to see the man, and thank him with his own lips. How incomprehensible it seemed now! But that desire must have soon worn off, for, a year or two after that again, there had been something said in one of the periodical letters from India about never coming home, and he remembered that he had not been sorry. And then gradually, by slow degrees which he could not now exactly follow, he began to have disagreeable associations with those letters and every thing that reminded him of the writer, and preferred to forget, when he could, that any such person existed. Not that he had ever admitted such feelings even in his own mind—no, he had tried to be grateful to the very last, tried to the very last to humble himself at that other one's feet, and make him out a friend and benefactor and hero; he was actually ashamed to think how he had tried.

And yet there was a kind of satisfaction too in remembering; if he had gone through so much then, he was the more entitled to regard the debt as wiped out now. Yes indeed, it was wiped out—whatever debt there had been—wiped out ten million times. He was free—free to hate the fellow if he liked—aye, and he would hate him—he hated him already, hated him so that if a wish could strike him dead that wish should be uttered.



Perhaps he was dead already.

As this thought passed through Anstin's mind the room suddenly grew more dreary and spectral than ever—so much so that for some seconds he absolutely dared not look round. What if the person he had been thinking of were indeed dead, and what if the dead had the power of returning to spy the thoughts and actions of the living? What if he were not alone in that room as he had believed, but watched from some dark corner by the angry eyes of his dead enemy—the enemy whose memory he was about to rob of the last chance of vindication? How stern those eyes would look if they were really there! how they would seek to frown him down and scare him from his purpose! But he would not be scared from it; he was alive, and, being alive, could surely have his own way against any number of dead men. Still, it was a dreadful thing to think of those eyes watching him.

He forced a smile; the idea was so horrible that he was obliged to take refuge in unbelief. No, the fellow was not dead; it was absurd to suppose it—if it had been so, the news would have come long ago. He was living still—living, and perhaps at that very instant plotting to return and ruin every body he had a grudge against—calculating, very likely, how he would bring forward that letter—What! and there the letter still lay waiting for him, and who knew but that he was already on his way? Ah! fool to sit there idly while the precious minutes slipped by! And with a muttered curse against his own tardiness Austin staggered to his feet once more.

This time he felt it necessary to bring some instrument to the assault, and, after looking round vainly for something more suitable, he clutched desperately at the poker. As he did so, he remembered with a kind of shudder something he had read about somebody having dashed out a man's brains with a poker the other day; but he did not put the thing down for that, only grasped it the tighter. To get at that letter he was ready to dash out a man's brains if it were needful; yes, even though the man were Harold Maxwell.

He struck the first blow with his new weapon—a heavy, well-planted blow just under the key-hole of the middle drawer. But no sooner had he struck than he paused in consternation at the noise he had himself made. What had he been thinking of? If he went on, the whole household would be alarmed. He listened a few minutes, hardly daring to move, and then, hearing nothing but the wailing of the wind without, laid down the poker softly on the carpet, and set himself to consider a more silent mode of achieving his purpose. For as yet he had made no progress towards his end; there was a dimple under the key-hole of the middle drawer, but that was all.

Soon a new idea occurred to him.

He crossed the room towards a small cabinet which stood at the farther end of it, and in which he kept all his most important deeds and papers. This he unlocked, and after a minute's search drew forth a large bunch of keys of all shapes and sizes and varieties of workmanship, or rather a collection of such bunches, being indeed the whole of Uncle Gilbert's stock, and Uncle Gilbert had locked up every thing.

Thus armed, he knelt down by the mahogany chest yet again, and, choosing the most likely—

looking keys of the set, began to experiment with them on the lock of that obstinate middle drawer. The first was a failure—so was the second—so was the third; but the fourth—when he tried to turn it, there was a click as though it nearly fitted into the wards, but not quite; he tried again with greater force and it went round.

The drawer was unlocked.

With hands that trembled so that he could hardly control their movements, he pulled it open and began to search. A sheet of tissue-paper lay on the top (what an intolerable rustle it made as he tossed it off!), and then came a quantity of children's clothes—a little worn cloth pelisse, and a boy's cap, and a tiny white embroidered robe, and other such articles, which he huddled aside almost wrathfully while he thrust his hands down to the bottom. He felt something hard and square lying there, and drew it eagerly out, but it was not what he expected—only a great book, with gay paper covers much the worse for wear, and a written label pasted outside with the inscription—"Austy's Scrap-book. From dear Papa and Mamma."

The sight made him pause an instant in the very hottest of his search.

How well he remembered writing that label, to be sure—it was in his old office-days at Liverpool, one evening when he had come home from business; and he had been at such pains in devising flourishes and painting up the strokes! So that was the drawer where his wife kept the things belonging to their dead children—he understood all about the little pelisse and cap now. Poor children—poor dear children—well, he would meet them all again some day—they were looking down upon him now, perhaps. Ah! what could they think of him for what he was doing? Still he must go on; for their sakes as well as his own he must go on. They would not wish their father to be disgraced.

He put the things back into the drawer—a great deal more tenderly than he had taken them out, even examining one or two of them with reverent curiosity. As he came to the little white embroidered robe again, he noticed that it was marked with the initials H. W.—so it had been the baby's; the baby had been christened Harold, had been called Harry sometimes, like—like that other. Poor baby—perhaps it was almost as well—He could not have borne to have that name perpetually shouted about the house.

He covered up the robe very quickly, and, shutting the drawer rather in a hurry, proceeded to try the same key on the one below. After a little difficulty he got it open, as he had done the first, and, with hands that shook, if possible, more than ever, tore off the sheet of paper spread over its contents.

The first thing he saw was a woman's dress of white muslin, or rather muslin that had once been white, for it was soiled and crushed now as though by years of hoarding. He thought at first it was some old dress of Emmy's, and was tumbling it up very disrespectfully, when his finger caught in a bunch of artificial flowers which in another instant he saw to be a spray of orange-blossom. He understood now—it was her wedding-dress which his wife garnered up so carefully; those very flowers in which his finger had caught had risen and fallen on her bosom that

morning when she stood by his side in church murmuring the responses.

Ah! how beautiful she had looked—he remembered, as though it were yesterday—and how proud he had felt, and how determined to make her happy! But he did not know then how that boy-brother at her side was to grow up and spoil every thing—that boy who had stood so close to her, looking as pleased and holding up his head as high as if he had been a king's son instead of a poor beggar whose very schooling had to be paid for. No, truly he did not know then; if he had, surely he could not have kept himself from committing murder on the spot.

He lifted out the dress as carefully as he could and laid it on one side, then turned to the drawer again and saw—a brown-leather writing-case.

His breath came short and thick; for a few moments he could do nothing for sheer want of air. When he was a little recovered he seized on the writing-case with both hands, and, lifting it with some difficulty (for he still felt faint and giddy), staggered to the table and set it down.

He looked round the room, half-fearful that somebody might appear to dispute his right. Nobody was there, but as he looked he was for the first time struck by a strange resemblance between that room and the one in which he had waited to see Uncle Gilbert die, and an eerie shiver crept over him almost as though he felt himself once more in an atmosphere of death. And yet the shape of the two rooms was entirely different, and so was the furniture—he could not account for the fancy. And then there was no monotonously-ticking clock to vex him here—nothing but the storm outside and the fluttering beat of his own heart.

He roused himself; there was more for him to do, and he must do it.

The case was locked, but he did not think much of such obstacles now. After vainly trying one or two keys, he found that this lock was of more complicated construction than the others had been; so he set to work in a slightly different method, taking out his penknife and saving through the leathern flap to which the lock was attached. He was very full of ridiculous fancies, certainly, for as he slowly made his way through the resisting substance he found himself wondering if the sensation was any thing like that of cutting a man's throat.

In a minute more the case was open, and the contents—a loose mass of letters and manuscripts—were exposed to view.

He plunged his hand eagerly among them, taking up one paper after another, and holding it close to his eyes almost as though he had been near-sighted—not that he was really so, but just now there was a thick film before all he saw which made it difficult for him to discern any thing.

Presently a stifled murmur escaped him, and his fingers closed with feverish tenacity round a letter the superscription of which he was thus examining. He had recognized his own writing on the envelope, and he knew that at last he had found that which he sought.

He clutched at the table for support, and let himself drop into a chair that stood by, unable to keep his feet longer for a sharp cutting pain in his side which seemed to vibrate thence through

his whole frame. But he held the letter as tightly as ever, and, mingled with the pain, felt a thrill of exultation as at some great victory. So he had got it into his possession at last—the only existing evidence of his shame—had got it into his possession to do with it as he would! Ah! the delight there would be in seeing the burning paper curl and frizzle and writhe, and then fall down in crisp black ash, to be crushed and stamped out of existence under the sole of his foot!

He drew the lamp nearer and turned up the wick a little higher, then, watching the flame with almost epicurean zest, daintily took the letter out of the envelope and unfolded it.

Stop! it might be as well, perhaps, just to glance over the thing first, to make quite sure that he had really got what he wanted. He held the paper up to his eyes—he had to look at things more closely than ever now—and made out a few words at sight of which his heart gave a great throb of recognition that for a moment took the pain at his side away.

Yes, that was it, sure enough; how well he remembered writing it—that night—after every body was asleep—sitting in the little back bedroom of the old house—with his wife lying in the next room, and poor Austy in a crib by her bedside; the doctor had been to see them that evening, and said he could not answer for either of them. If it were not for the wind he could almost fancy the time come back again, and there had been a little wind that night too; the sashes had rattled once and made him let a great spot of ink fall on the table; had that spot ever been washed out, he wondered? But the table stood in quite a different place to-night, and it was not the same table either—no, every thing was different. Besides, nobody was in the next room now; or was she there still—could it be? why then Austy must be there too—Austy was living yet—all the children—So it had been only a dream, after all—only a dream, and every thing was right again; why, had not Harry just come home with the scholarship? Hark, what was that?—not the wind—a voice—Uncle Gilbert's voice. What! does he want to come in? no, no, don't let him—don't! If it had not been for Uncle Gilbert—Keep him out—keep him out; he shall not—Help, help! Agnes!

The last words were uttered aloud—uttered in a voice so shrill and piercing that the very walls seemed to ring with it.

But no one heard and no one answered.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### DAYLIGHT LET IN.

EMMY's sleep that night had been very disturbed and restless for the first two or three hours, and she did not awake next morning till it was already quite light—as light, at least, as was compatible with a bleak, cheerless sky, still overspread with heavy leaden-looking clouds which the night's storm had failed to disperse. They were accustomed to keep rather early hours at the Laurels, Austin's frequent journeys to Beacon Bay making it necessary for him to turn the short winter days to the best account; so, immediately on discovering how late it was, Emmy rose and set about her toilet, hurrying as much as

she could in order to be in time to preside at her father's breakfast. But she need not have troubled herself to make such haste, for when she descended to the breakfast-room her father was not yet there.

The urn was brought, and Emmy made the tea and coffee very expeditiously, still rather afraid that he would appear before things were quite ready for him. But he did not; he did not appear even by the time his coffee was prepared and poured out, and after a few minutes more she thought she would go up stairs and tell him that breakfast was waiting.

But instead of being on the point of coming down, as she had expected, he was evidently not even yet awake, for when she knocked at his door no answer was returned. She was just going to knock again when she remembered how tired and harassed he had looked the night before, and decided that it would be best to let him have all the rest possible. So she turned away from the door, stealing along on tip-toe lest she should have already disturbed him, and slipped softly down stairs again.

She went back to the breakfast-room, and sat down to her solitary meal, feeling it incumbent on her, as a matter of usage, to go through the form of taking something. But she had no appetite whatever, and did little else than sit disconsolately, looking at her father and mother's empty places, and breaking infinitesimal pieces of toast into her tea.

For she did not feel nearly so reassured this morning as she had predicted. On the contrary, what with the gray sunless weather and the unaccustomed solitude of the breakfast-room, she found every thing looking strangely dull and dreary, and could not keep herself from speculating dismally on the very worst that might happen as a consequence of her folly and treachery. Her poor dear mother! that was the idea in which all her anxieties centred.

As she was sitting thus dolefully by herself, making hardly any progress with her meal, the door opened, and she looked up half-expecting to see her father. But it was not her father, only a servant, who came in to say:

"Master is not down yet, I think, is he, miss? Because Mr. Podmore has just called, and wants to speak to him very particular on business. I told him master had not left his room yet, but he said he would step in and wait—he is in the library now. Would it be disturbing master if I was to go and tell him?"

"He was so late last night," said Emmy hesitatingly, "it seems almost a pity. Show Mr. Podmore in here; I will go to papa myself if it is of any consequence."

The man withdrew, and immediately afterwards the lawyer was ushered in.

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, how do you do?" said Emmy, rising to receive the little man with a good deal of cordiality, for it was quite a relief to her to have her solitude broken in upon. "I am breakfasting all alone, you see. Pray sit down; and may I give you a cup of tea?"

But Mr. Podmore accepted neither of these civilities.

"Thank you, I have had breakfast," he answered gravely, so gravely that Emmy might have felt a little surprised if she had been in the mood for noticing such details. "Mr. Waters

is not down yet, they tell me?" he added with a glance round the room.

"Not yet; indeed I fancy he is still asleep—at least he was a few minutes ago, and he was so late in going to bed last night that I did not like to disturb him. But of course if it is any thing very particular— Shall I go and tell him you are here?"

"Well, if you would be so kind, Miss Waters," said the lawyer, coughing gently behind his hand. "I have a business communication to make to him which perhaps it is better not to delay; in fact, it was my desire that there should be no delay which has made me intrude on you at this early hour. So if it is not giving you too much trouble—" and he coughed again.

If the speaker had been any other than Mr. Podmore, Emmy must certainly this time have been struck by the extra gravity of his demeanor—gravity which a slight shade of accompanying embarrassment only brought into additional relief. But then Mr. Podmore was always a little more solemn than other people, and, as has been seen, Emmy was not in an observant humor this morning.

"Is there any message I can take up?" she asked before leaving the room.

"Message? Oh no! I think it will be better that I myself— You might just mention to Mr. Waters that a circumstance has arisen with which it is necessary to make him acquainted, but that is all just now."

And then with another cough Mr. Podmore sat down to wait, and Emmy ran up stairs on her errand.

"Papa!" she said, knocking gently at her father's door, for she was afraid of rousing him too abruptly.

He did not answer, and she knocked again, a little louder than before.

"Papa dear, Mr. Podmore has just called."

Again there was no answer. She waited a second or two, and then softly turned the handle; she would go in and wake him with a kiss. But this was not to be done either, for the door was locked.

She tapped on the panels quite smartly.

"Papa, it is time to get up; Mr. Podmore is waiting for you—papa!"

Still no reply came. How sound asleep he was, to be sure! she had never known him sleep so heavily before. And how tiresome that he had locked the door!

Perhaps she might get in through the dressing-room. Yes, the dressing-room door was unlocked, sure enough, and she went round to the other door communicating with the bedroom. But when she tried it, she found this one fastened also.

"Papa!" she repeated, tapping rather more softly than the last time, for she remembered that this door was almost close to the head of the bed, "are you not going to get up this morning? It is past ten o'clock, and Mr. Podmore— Papa! papa!" and, suddenly losing all compunction about startling him, she knocked as loudly as she was able. But still no sound from within.

A terrible fear seized her—fear of what, she could not have said, but such fear as caused her heart in one instant to double its pulsations, and made her limbs nearly give way under her. She beat at the door with all her strength, shaking

and rattling it, and crying "Papa! papa!" as though she had all at once gone frantic. But no one answered, and, with a thrill of terror such as she had never felt in her life before, she rushed from the door and flew half-way down stairs, calling out wildly: "Mr. Podmore!"

The appeal was so loud that Mr. Podmore heard immediately, and came into the hall looking very much startled.

"What is the matter?"

The question seemed somehow to bring Emmy back to her senses. The necessity of explaining her fear to another person made them look so ridiculous that she felt almost ashamed of them. What could Mr. Podmore think of her for being so silly?

"It is very foolish of me—I beg your pardon, I'm sure. But—I can not make papa hear—he is sleeping so soundly, I suppose; and I don't know why, but for a moment I got almost afraid—Oh! don't trouble to come up."

But Mr. Podmore, taking no notice of these last words, began to come up instantly. There was another rush of fear through Emmy's heart. Was he afraid too, then?

"It was so very foolish of me," she said, forcing a smile as she turned back on her way up stairs again, with the lawyer close behind—"I am really quite ashamed. The very idea of being frightened about such a thing, you know! Papa dear, here is Mr. Podmore." And again she tapped at the bedroom door. But still there was no answer, no answer even when the summons was supplemented by a smart rap from the lawyer's cane.

"Is he a heavy sleeper usually?" inquired Mr. Podmore thoughtfully.

"Not usually," said Emmy, trembling very much; "no, he sleeps rather lightly, in a general way, but he went to bed so late last night, you see. It is really very awkward to know what to do, is it not?" and again she forced a little smile.

Mr. Podmore, however, seemed to feel the annoyance of the dilemma more than its absurdity, for he did not relax a muscle of his face, only smote upon the door again, harder than before. But all within continued silent.

"Was there any thing—any thing peculiar about him last night?" the lawyer asked, after a brief pause. "Did he seem at all in low spirits?"

"Oh! Mr. Podmore, what do you mean?" said Emmy, trembling more than ever; and then, as she remembered how strange and flighty her father's manner had been, she grew cold with vague apprehension. "He was a little nervous and out of sorts, perhaps, but what with one thing and another—and mamma being away too—that is enough to make us feel dull, of course."

"He can not have heard the news, surely?"

"The news! what news?" cried Emmy almost with a shriek. "Oh! is it any thing about mamma—any thing about—"

"No, no, nothing about your mamma, don't be frightened for that. It is about this Beacon Bay ranch—the shareholders held a meeting yesterday, and vetoed the project over the heads of the Directors; the land is not worth the amount it is mortgaged for. But he can not have heard any thing about it yet, I should think, has he?"

Emmy stood almost paralyzed with consternation. Nor was it the prospect of poverty that

dismayed her so, though she knew enough of her father's affairs to understand that the failure of the scheme for the Beacon Bay railway meant ruin utter and hopeless. But, crushing as such a reverse would have been to her under ordinary circumstances, she hardly felt it now; she thought of the news only in connection with her father, and in the light of that terrible question of the lawyer's as to his spirits on the previous evening—a question which seemed to open up a very abyss of dread possibilities. Oh! could it be that— But no; the more she reflected, the more she was convinced that, whatever causes of anxiety and harassment might have weighed on her father's mind last night, the knowledge of this new and final calamity was not among them; had he not expressly said that as regarded money matters every thing was going well?

"I am sure he has not heard—quite sure. Oh! how can you frighten me so! I tell you he sat up very late last night, so no wonder—Papa! papa! papa!"

She knocked at the door again with frenzied impatience. But the result was still the same.

"We must have it broken open," declared Mr. Podmore.

"Broken open!" cried Emmy. "Oh! surely—" She paused, half choking. Had it actually come to breaking open the door? And yet, extreme as the measure seemed, she could not say that it was unnecessary.

"He may have been taken with some slight illness, you know," said Mr. Podmore soothingly. "If you will wait a moment I will go and call the servants. Don't be afraid; I dare say it is nothing of consequence."

He ran down stairs quickly. Emmy leaned against the rail of the landing and waited; she could not have moved or even stood upright without support. Oh! what did it all mean? or was it only a dream?

"Here! bring a chisel or hammer or something," she heard Mr. Podmore's voice say. "Make haste—there is something wrong up stairs—make haste!"

Emmy quivered in every limb. Something wrong! how undoubtedly he said it—something wrong! And he had just told her not to be frightened.

There was a confused noise from below as of many footsteps, and then Mr. Podmore spoke again:

"Stop! run for the doctor, one of you—Dr. Plummer. He is close by, that's one good thing; his carriage was standing at Mr. Brown's as I came along. Run—tell him to come directly."

The doctor! Emmy grew faint and dizzy as she heard. What was the doctor to do? But to be sure, if it really was a case of slight illness—

The footsteps began to ascend the stairs. Emmy looked, and saw first Mr. Podmore coming up and one of the men-servants following with a hammer and chisel, and next the cook drying her hands hastily on her apron, and then the two housemaids, and the lady's-maid, and the kitchen-maid—the whole household down to the very knife-boy—all trooping up to see and hear. What did they mean by it? They thought, then, that something very serious was the matter?

"Had you not better go down stairs, Miss Waters?" said Mr. Podmore as he came up, and

he spoke more kindly than she had ever heard him. But she answered "No," almost rudely.

They all came crowding on to the landing. Emmy had been standing a little way from the bedroom door, and found herself almost shut out from a view of it by so many pressing round. But she did not make her way to the front again, for the simple reason that for the time all strength and energy seemed to have deserted her; so she remained in the background, leaning against the rail and listening.

"You had better drive it in there—just above the lock," she heard Mr. Podmore say.

"Just here, sir?"

"Yes."

And then came a heavy crashing blow, the sound of which made Emmy's blood tingle down to the very finger-tips, while almost in the same instant she looked up with a wild flash of hope and eager expectation. Surely, surely he must hear this.

But no, all was silent in the room, and presently the blow was repeated, and Emmy quailed as though it had been dealt upon herself. Still no sign of movement within.

For some minutes this went on—one blow after another (sharp ringing blows that seemed to vibrate through the staircase and the whole house)—the cracking and creaking of resisting timber—the clash and clang of metal; and in the intervals dead silence. What with that noise and that silence, Emmy felt as though she must go mad.

"Isn't it beginning to give a little now?" said Mr. Podmore at last, and the sound of his voice came almost as a relief.

"Just a little, sir, but it's wonderful firm. If we could but set to work in two places at once, that would do it directly, I think."

"Go and get another chisel, then, or an axe, or something. We must have it open somehow."

"I'll go and see what there is, sir. The wood-chopper, perhaps."

Somebody went down stairs and there was a momentary silence—how grim and death-like that silence was! But hardly had the echo of the descending footsteps ceased when other footsteps were heard mounting—heavy, slow-treading footsteps that sounded like those of a person in authority. Emmy looked, and saw a large stout figure coming up stairs, which she immediately recognized as that of Dr. Plummer.

"Dear me! dear me! this is very bad," said the doctor lugubriously, as, wheezing somewhat, he reached the level of the landing. "And you have not got the door open yet, I see."

"No, not yet. I am so glad you have come," said Mr. Podmore warmly; and nevertheless Mr. Podmore was not a man wont to find any amount of responsibility too much for him.

"Oh! of course I made all the haste I could when I heard—And this has been quite sudden, has it? He did not seem at all poorly yesterday?"

The question was not addressed to Emmy, who, standing behind every body else, was out of the way of observation. But Emmy heard, and felt an icy chill in all her veins. What did the man speak of as "this?"

"Not as I know of," said the cook, dropping a courtesy—"leastways not to be laid up. But he has been looking dreadful pale and gashly-like two or three days back, and it was only last

night I see a winding-sheet in the candle, and thought to myself—"

"Pooh, pooh, that's neither here nor there. Did any thing special occur in the course of yesterday to excite him, Podmore, do you know?"

"I can't say about any thing special, but of course the general state—Well, is that the chopper? Bring it here."

"I think we shall do it now, sir."

"Lay it underneath—so, and then give a wrench as I drive in the chisel. Now!"

A loud shivering crash—louder than any thing that had gone before. Emmy felt herself growing absolutely rigid with the extremity of her suspense, and she fixed her eyes on the upper panels of the door—it was all she could see of it for the intervening press of by-standers—with a gaze that was almost vacant.

"It is coming now, sir. Once more, please."

Another crash, louder still this time—a sound of creaking hinges; and then, instead of the panels there was a dark space, faintly illumined by a dim ray of lamp-light. Emmy had a singular sensation of dreamy surprise. Why should it be night in there when it was daylight everywhere else?

There was a general move in front of her; every body was going forward into the room. Emmy followed automatically; her past terrors had half stupefied her, and as she passed into that strangely-lighted chamber, where the yellow glow of the lamp mingled spectrally with a gray glimmer of daylight that struggled in between the closed curtains, every thing looked so unreal that she scarcely knew whether she was in the waking world at all.

Suddenly she caught sight of a figure sitting at a table in the middle of the room, and felt a thrill of indescribable relief. Why, so there was her father, after all!

Probably she uttered some slight cry or exclamation, for somebody just then looked round—it was one of the housemaids—and, instantly getting between her and the table, took her by the arm and attempted to turn her back.

"No, miss dear, no—better not. Come down stairs with me—I'll take care of you. Come, miss dear."

But Emmy extricated herself angrily, and, pushing past the speaker, made a step forward which brought her once more in view of the table. There sat her father, his face propped on one hand, a letter in the other, his eyes turned towards her—

Why did she not go up to him?

Why? Ah! because she saw that those eyes which stared at her so fixedly were the glazed eyes of a dead man.

She had never looked on death before, and yet, seeing it now, she recognized it at once. She stood still for an instant, then tottered, and, losing her balance, dropped into the ready arms of the good-natured housemaid. But, giddy and half-fainting though she was, she had still strength left to resist all the girl's kindly efforts to lead her from the room.

Meanwhile Mr. Podmore and the doctor, too much engrossed to take notice of Emmy's presence in that dimly-lighted room, or indeed to remember her existence at all, had gone up to the table, and stood contemplating the rigid form that sat there so grimly and immovably.

"Quite cold, I suppose?" said Mr. Podmore presently, in a low voice—so low as to be almost a whisper.

"Oh! quite," returned the doctor, and his voice was as subdued as the other's had been. "It must have been several hours ago."

"And—and how do you think it was?" asked Mr. Podmore again, and he looked round with a glance that was almost timid. "The room seems in great confusion."

"Oh! but I believe it has been quite natural. I have seen for a long time back that there was something wrong with the heart; I am not at all surprised."

"I don't see any thing like a glass or vial, certainly," said Mr. Podmore, with another nervous glance round; "but still it is so strange—That letter—it seems as if he had been writing something to leave behind him. We had better look, had we not?"

"I think we had," said the doctor. "Will you do it, then?"

"Very well, as you wish it. The evidence may be very important."

With something of a shudder Mr. Podmore put out his hand and took hold of a corner of the letter that drooped down from the dead man's fingers. The tenacity with which those fingers had closed round it must have relaxed somewhat just before the last, for they offered hardly any resistance to the attempted withdrawal of the paper, and the lawyer found himself almost at once in possession of what he wanted.

Just then some one drew back the window curtains, and a flood of chill gray light was let in upon the scene, overpowering the rays of the lamp, and instantly bringing into cold, hard, bare relief the ghastly outlines which they had softened. The effect was inexpressibly dreary.

"Let me see," muttered Mr. Podmore, drawing near the window. "'My dear Harry—who can that be, I wonder?—if you will do me the favor—'cashing the inclosed draft'—Why, what's this about? And the date is nineteen years ago."

"Here is the envelope, sir, I think," said one of the servants, and picked something up from the floor as he spoke.

"Give it here. 'Harold Maxwell, Esq.' Harold Maxwell—why, that was— And then the date—yes, every thing shows— Why, what do you think—that forgery—he did it himself, after all!"

"I can hardly think so," said the doctor, who was still standing by the table. "The more I look, the more I should judge it to have been quite natural."

"No, no, I don't mean that. No, that forgery—don't you remember?—what that young fellow Maxwell got into trouble about—old Mr. Waters made sure he was the one, and so did I. Well, now it seems that all the time—"

He stopped, interrupted by a feeble cry from the other end of the room. He looked round; there was a commotion among the women servants, and somewhat to his consternation he saw that they had gathered round the drooping figure of Emmy, who lay apparently senseless in the arms of one of them.

"How! Miss Waters here! What do you mean by allowing— What is the matter, Plummer? has she fainted?"

But Emmy had not fainted; it would have been almost better for her if she had. Her bodily powers had given way, but in the midst of their collapse she had consciousness enough to retain distinct recollection of the lawyer's words, and to comprehend the terrible charge against her father which they embodied; yes, and not only to comprehend, but to believe. Like lightning there flashed through her mind the memory of a thousand little circumstances—some that had passed almost unnoticed at the time, some that had surprised and perplexed her as altogether unintelligible—which now, in the sudden light thus cast on them, arranged themselves at once as parts of a consistent and coherent whole. Her mother's infinite love and gratitude to the man who in the world's eyes had been the disgrace and well-nigh ruin of the family—Miss Egerton's abrupt change of feeling in his favor—the agitation shown on the subject by her father—all came back upon her now, and gave to those few broken phrases of Mr. Podmore's a horrible significance which seemed to set her brain on fire. The very anguish of the discovery kept her stunned faculties awake, and she understood every thing—understood that all the reprobation she had ever bestowed by word or thought on her uncle Harold belonged not to him but to her father, the father whom she had loved so, whom she had been so proud of—ah! how proud she had been of him! And now—only to think—

"Carry her to her own room immediately," she heard the doctor's voice say. "It is not fit for her to be here; she ought not to have been allowed to come at all."

What! did they want to take her away from him—from her own father? Did they think she would desert him just because—Ah! but if they all turned round to despise and revile him, she would only love him the more.

She made a violent effort, and, breaking furiously away from the astonished by-standers, rushed forward to the place where that stolid figure still sat mute and motionless. For one instant she paused with something of shrinking as she saw the white face and staring eyes so familiar and yet so strange, but in the next her love had triumphed over every other feeling, and, throwing her arms round the form that had once been her father's, she pressed her warm lips against those cold ones over and over again in a passion of grief and despairing tenderness.

It was long before they could disengage her from that to which she clung so fondly, and when at last they did she had fainted in very truth.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE LAST OF UNCLE GILBERT'S MONEY.

THERE was bitter grief and passionate lamentation that day at the Laurels—the grief and lamentation of a widow and orphan for one who, whatever might have been his errors, had ever made a loving husband and father.

For Emmy was not left long to be the only mourner. Mrs. Waters, anxious to return as soon as possible, had started alone from Southampton that very morning, and reached home a few hours later, to find her husband no more, and

his guilt proclaimed to all the world by his own deed.

It may be supposed how terrible a blow was dealt to her by the tidings—so terrible indeed it was, that for some time her own life appeared to tremble in the balance. With all his faults, her husband had always remained, in her eyes, the lover of her youth, the friend and companion of her later years, made all the dearer to her by the fierce furnace of affliction through which they had passed together; and, losing him, it seemed as though part of herself were taken from her. And then the sorrow of bereavement was further embittered by the consciousness that the catastrophe which he so dreaded—the catastrophe which he had died in a guilty attempt to avert—had, in consequence of that very attempt, actually taken place, and that his memory was branded as a criminal's in the eyes of all who had known him, in the eyes of his own child—there was the worst of all. That Emmy should know—Emmy, who had held her head so high, who had been so proud of her father and her father's family and all connected with him—and that now she should find out that his was the crime the supposed author of which she had so merclessly judged—ah! what could she think?

Poor Emmy! the discovery did indeed cost her many a sharp pang of silent anguish. And yet, harrowing as it was to her to know the secret of her father's shame, the knowledge nowise diminished the filial love and tenderness with which she thought of him. Did she not remember that she was guilty too?

The days passed, and the effects of the shock on the bereaved wife were so far softened that the apprehensions at first felt on her account gradually became allayed. It was probably well for her, and her daughter also, that at this time they were forced to think of something else than their grief, by the necessity of breaking up their household, and leaving forever the sumptuous new abode which had witnessed alike their greatest glories and their bitterest sorrows. The funeral was scarcely over when this task was imposed upon them, for the owners of the Laurels could not be expected to let them live there rent-free, and it was ascertained that the remaining available means which Austin had left behind would barely suffice to pay his creditors ten shillings in the pound. Mrs. Waters and Emmy were utterly and absolutely destitute, without a farthing in the world to call their own.

Happily for them they had friends who in this extremity would not see them cast out upon the world without a home. They were, in fact, offered a home yet more magnificent than that from which they had been driven, receiving a pressing invitation from Olivia to fix their quarters at Egerton Park; she had abandoned all idea of giving up Egerton Park now. But they knew that Olivia was at this time busy with renewed preparations for her marriage with Mr. Graham, or rather Harold Maxwell; for he was at liberty now to bear his own name, which was indeed, for the present, quite the most popular in all Chorcombe. It is true that she was willing to delay those preparations somewhat for their sakes, but they did not choose to intrude the presence of mourners into a house which ought to be given up to rejoicing. Another home had therefore to be sought for them; and as they would not accept

any but a very humble one, they were ultimately established, by the joint assistance of Olivia and her betrothed, in a little house in the village street not far from that in which they had lived before, and in no degree better or more comfortable; and yet, mean as it was, they deemed themselves fortunate in securing it.

So they crept back to the old place, how sadly and sorrowfully need not be said.

They had spent dreary days in that street before, but they had always had then something brighter to look forward to, while now there appeared no possibility of better things, and the very faculty of hope seemed to be extinguished in both mother and daughter; for Emmy had lost all trace of natural youthful elasticity, and was, if possible, more depressed, more utterly cast down and crushed, even than Mrs. Waters herself. The memory of her fault and its consequences weighed upon her constantly, repressing all her characteristic buoyancy of spirit and humbling her to the very dust, and this notwithstanding that she had made full confession to her mother and received full forgiveness. It was something to be forgiven by her mother, but she could not so easily forgive herself.

With Emmy thus prostrated it may be imagined how dismal their new home must have looked, especially as it was almost entirely uncheered by any communication with the outer world. During the first days of their bereavement their seclusion was so absolute that they hardly crossed the threshold of their dwelling, and admitted no visits save only those of their own near relation, Harold Maxwell, and Olivia Egerton as his affianced wife. Emmy had through her mother asked and obtained pardon from them also, or she could not have endured their kindness. And in a very short time even the solace of those visits ceased; for one morning, within four or five weeks of the memorable journey to Southampton, Harold Maxwell and Olivia Egerton were married, and went away for a tour on the Continent.

The wedding was very quiet, in consideration of the feelings of poor Austin's wife and daughter, for whose sake both bride and bridegroom wished to escape the demonstrations with which the good people of Chorcombe would otherwise have celebrated the occasion. But unimposing as were the external adjuncts of the ceremony, the knot was tied as firmly as though a train of a dozen bridesmaids had been present at the tying, and the newly-made husband and wife were content, whoever else may have found fault.

Emmy and her mother had been prepared to feel the absence of those two kind friends and comforters very keenly, and so for a time they did, though after the first day or two hardly so much as they had expected. The fact was that just at this juncture an old acquaintanceship was renewed by which it came to pass that other visits were substituted for those which were temporarily dropped.

This renewal of acquaintanceship took place in the following wise:

The mother and daughter were coming out of church on the first Sunday after the departure of Harold and his wife—it was the first Sunday, also, on which the mourners had brought themselves to appear in church, or indeed in any place where they must confront the prying eyes which

they felt would be upon them—when Emmy, through the folds of her thick crape veil, caught a glimpse of a manly well-built figure a few steps in front of her standing quite still just within the door-way, as though waiting for some one. She started violently, and looked round to her mother as if for protection; for, though the face was not just then turned towards her, she knew—how she could not have said, yet nevertheless she did know in a moment—that the figure was that of John Thwaites. But Mrs. Waters was some paces behind, having stopped to speak to a poor woman to whom she had been kind in other days, and who now had intercepted her with some sincere, if ill-timed, expressions of sympathy. There were already two or three groups between her mother and herself, so that it was impossible to turn back without great awkwardness, and Emmy resolved to go forward and wait outside; if she passed quickly enough, perhaps he would not notice her.

She hurried on, therefore, as fast as the throng in front permitted, with lowered eyes and averted head, yet all the while inwardly palpitating with a thousand old memories of the past which that glimpse had brought back. The last time she had seen John Thwaites standing in that door-way, not much less than a year ago now, he had been waiting for her—waiting for her in point of fact at least, though nominally for her father and mother—for in those days he had been wont to walk home with the family from church almost as a matter of course. But since the rise in their fortunes he had never been asked to accompany them, and had never offered; so that, as his place was in the choir gallery, immediately above where Emmy sat, they had scarcely so much as seen each other on Sundays lately—not even at a distance. And only to think of his standing in that door-way again, waiting for somebody, but not for her—ah! who could it be for? Only to think of passing him and never being so much as noticed by him, for she had passed him now, had she not? Yes, she had passed out of the building altogether.

"Miss Waters," she heard a voice just behind her say.

Ah! how well she knew that voice! its tones seemed to vibrate through her so that she hardly knew what to do for trembling. She stopped—she could not have gone forward even if she would—and turned slightly round, not daring, however, to raise her eyes, in spite of the veil that sheltered her.

"I beg your pardon for stopping you," the voice went on, and it quivered as though with some strange agitation, "but—but—but—" here the speaker paused, apparently to seek some available excuse—"But it is so long since I saw you, you know."

"Yes, very long," muttered Emmy, half choking, but she felt absolutely compelled to say something.

"And—and I did not like—I was afraid you might think it a liberty—if—I called without asking leave. Would you consider it an intrusion if—if sometimes—just to pay my respects?"

There was a sob from under the veil; if her life had depended on it, she could not have kept that sob down.

"Oh! how kind you are! how kind!" and

the veil was not so thick but that he could see the tears streaming down her face as the words broke from her. "After all that has— Ah! how kind you are!"

Her voice was stifled by another sob, and, fearful of giving way altogether in view of the whole departing congregation, she muffled her face in her veil, and turned it hastily away.

He saw what she was afraid of, and did not seek to detain her, only put out his hand and held hers for an instant, saying:

"I will wish you good-bye, then, just for the present. And oh! Miss Emmy, if you only knew—"

He broke off, and, giving her hand a lingering pressure which seemed to take away all abruptness from the sudden conclusion, turned on his heel and was presently lost to sight among the by-standers. Emmy had to muffle up her face closer than ever, but, in spite of her tears, she felt in her heart the first ray of comfort that had penetrated there for weeks. She could never expect to be entirely forgiven, of course, but still only to hear him say such kind words— When her mother rejoined her a few moments afterwards she found her hardly able to speak for weeping, and yet as they walked home together Mrs. Waters might have noticed, if she had looked for it, a certain firmness and elasticity in the girl's step which showed that going out that morning had done her good.

John Thwaites was not long in making use of the implied permission thus received. The very next afternoon he found his way into the little parlor, the counterpart of that in which he had spent so many pleasant hours; and, though the first visit was necessarily more or less a painful one, it was yet so welcome to both mother and daughter that, when he asked leave to repeat it soon, he again found ready assent. And he did repeat it soon—very soon—repeated it time after time, so often, and at such short intervals that neighbors began to gossip on the subject, and to say to each other as they saw him come up the street that they supposed it was quite an understood thing now. And gradually—but not for some little time after the neighbors had begun to make their remarks, for she had grown much more diffident than she used to be—gradually a certain vague hope formed itself in Emmy's mind; could it be that he was going to forgive her altogether? Ah! but then he did not know the full extent of her fault; when he did—and the hope became dashed with fear again.

At last a day came when all doubts were decided—a day when, finding her for a few minutes alone, he asked her in so many words if she would be his wife. She could not say no, and yet for a while she would not say yes; not, however, from any remaining leaven of the old coquettish spirit, but because she insisted on first confessing to him, with many a tear and sob and painful flushing of the cheek, all that she had once done to forfeit her own esteem and his. But when he had heard he only repeated his question yet again, with words of love and devotion even more tender than before, and this time she did not delay her answer.

The neighbors might gossip now as confidentially as they pleased; it was an understood thing in very truth.

For three or four months even after this, Emmy



and her mother still clung to their poor home in the village street without any outward change in their way of life, not choosing that any such should be made till at least half a year had elapsed since the death of the husband and father whom they mourned so tenderly; they would fain have made the period of probation even longer, but John Thwaites's importunities were too much for them. About the end of that time, therefore, they began to prepare for removal from that humble dwelling, which they were about to exchange for a larger and more commodious one—not so sumptuous indeed as the Laurels, to say nothing of Chorcombe Lodge, but still infinitely preferable to the mean little cottage which they were leaving. This new abode was a trim little white house in the outskirts of the town, which John Thwaites had taken and begun to furnish. Begun to furnish, it has been said, for his operations were suspended at a very early stage by a letter received from Nidbourne, where Mr. and Mrs. Harold Maxwell, just returned from the Continent, were spending a few weeks before coming to settle down finally at Egerton Park, and whence they now wrote announcing that they had given orders for the furnishing of their niece's future home at their own expense.

Nor did their kindness to the young couple stop even here. A day or two before that fixed for the wedding, they came back from Nidbourne—we may be sure that their visit there had not been without profit to the poor fisherman and his wife, whose misfortunes had contributed so much to bring about their new-found happiness—hastening their return in order to be present at the ceremony, and indeed to take a part in it. For from whose hands should John Thwaites receive his bride but from those of her uncle?—that uncle whom she now loved and honored as much as ever she had once reprobated him. And when every thing was over there was slipped into Emmy's hand, as a joint gift from her uncle and aunt, a tiny purse, which, tiny as it was, turned out to contain such a sum in bank-notes as would keep her handsomely supplied with pin-money for an indefinite number of years. So that the poor little bride did not go to her husband quite portionless, after all, though indeed it would not have made any difference in her welcome if she had.

Some years have now passed since the last of the above-recorded events took place; so many that, in the trim white house which is, and has been ever since, the happy home of John Thwaites with his wife and his wife's mother, there are now some four or five other inmates, little rosy-cheeked curly-headed creatures, with pattering feet and merry voices that make music in the ears of their elders—rather too loud music, perhaps, sometimes. What with these permanent additions to the household, and the attendants whom their presence renders necessary, the house is getting too small for the family requirements, and a move is even now in contemplation to another larger and more convenient, and also more suitable to Mr. Thwaites's present position as one of the greatest employers of labor in or near Chorcombe.

For John Thwaites is now a principal partner in the concern of which he was formerly manager, and has prospered so well that, if he cared for living there, Chorcombe Lodge itself would scarcely

be beyond his means—only that, after standing tenantless and neglected for a great many years, it has been recently bought up cheap by the Guardians of the Chorcombe Union for their new work-house. So John is building a new house for himself—after a somewhat less ambitious design, certainly, but still promising to be quite one of the best in the neighborhood—on a piece of ground which he has bought close to Egerton Park. This proximity to Egerton Park will prove an immense saving of time and trouble in more than one quarter, the communication between the Thwaites family and that at the great house being very constant. Indeed there is hardly a fine day on which some of the rosy-cheeked curly-headed little people aforesaid do not find their way up to Egerton Park to join certain other little people whom they find there, as rosy-cheeked and curly-headed as themselves, in a game of romps under the trees.

It need scarcely be said that the intercourse between the two families is by no means restricted to those merry gatherings of the children. Olivia and Emmy are almost like sisters in their intimacy, or would be at least, only that, Emmy's mother being Olivia's sister in downright earnest, the fact of their being aunt and niece is necessarily more kept in view than the few years' difference in their ages would seem to warrant. Then between the heads of the two households, Harold Maxwell and John Thwaites, there is the strongest bond of reciprocal respect and goodwill; and although one is more a man of letters, and one more a man of business than the other, each takes sufficient interest in his friend's pursuits to make their meetings as mutually pleasant as they are frequent. And their meetings are very frequent, the members of each family, indeed, feeling themselves nearly as much at home in the one house as in the other.

There is only a single occasion in the whole year when visitors at Egerton Park may not make almost sure of meeting Emmy and her husband and mother, and that is one evening about Christmas-time, when Olivia, who has a strong dislike to any thing like avowed family feuds, makes a point of asking the Clare Court people to dinner. The Clare Court people include Randal and his wife, the widow of a deceased leather-merchant, whom he married a year or two after the final annihilation of his hopes in another quarter, and whose property has completely relieved the family from all financial embarrassment—a circumstance of which she is supposed to take considerable advantage in all matrimonial differences of opinion, which scandal says not unfrequently occur.

It may be understood why Emmy is not invited to meet these guests, but it must be added that the fact of Olivia's bringing herself to entertain them is the most emphatic proof that she could possibly give of her wish to set an example of family harmony. Indeed the sight of Randal Egerton is to Olivia almost as painful as it would be to Emmy herself, reminding her as it does of a danger which she once escaped so narrowly that she can never recall it without a shudder, mingled with a very disagreeable sense of shame and humiliation.

"Ah! Harry," she said to her husband at the conclusion of the latest of these annual penances, "when I see that man, and think how near—you

know what it was I was so near, Harry—when I think of it all, I wonder how you can ever have come to forgive me.”

“My sweet one,” he answered, drawing her fondly towards him—for the two are as lover-like with each other in word and deed as ever they used to be—“how can you say such things? As if you did not know that all the need of forgiveness was on my side—or do you want to make me humble by reminding me?”

“On your side! Oh! Harry, Harry! No, it was on mine—all on mine. The fault was with

the one who first doubted the other, and you never doubted me; but I—”

He interrupted the flow of her self-reproaches with a kiss.

“My own impetuous darling!” and he could not forbear smiling at her vehemence. “Very well, we will not quarrel about it; we will say it was nobody’s fault, if you like. And now, my Olivia, we will not talk of those things any more; they were part of an evil that is over, and ought to be forgotten—part of the curse of Uncle Gilbert’s money.”

THE END.







"THIS TRIAL HAS INDEED BEEN HER LAST."

# IN DUTY BOUND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MARK WARREN," "DEEPPDALE VICARAGE," "A BRAVE LIFE,"  
&c., &c.

*Knox, Isaac Craig*

*ILLUSTRATED.*



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# IN DUTY BOUND.

## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT HAS BECOME OF HER?

"IF he took a house, he must marry." He thought so, as he stood with his back to the fire, indulging in a kind of reverie. He had lately come to East Bramley, to set up as a lawyer. In fact, he was beginning the world with no very great resources at his command.

If you cross the market-place, you will come to a modest-looking door, which stands open all day to admit clients. Here you can read his name and profession, engraven in brass letters—"Mr. Vincent, solicitor."

A young lawyer, with good introductions, and with plenty of address, was sure to be welcome in the small and rather dull town of East Bramley. Horace Vincent had no reason to complain of his reception; but he looked forward to happier times than these—times when he should be able to quit Mrs. Perkins's lodgings, and have a house of his own.

There was a house to let a few doors off. It was just the place for him, if he could only afford the rent; but the utmost stretch his resources would allow—nay, his whole income—was £150 a year. Besides, if he took a house, he must marry.

As if by an involuntary movement, he raised his eyes to the window. No; there was nothing to be seen. The inhabitants of the market-place were taking their tea. Early hours were observed in East Bramley. Besides, of all the unsuitable persons in the world—

No—no; he could not begin life by making a mistake like that. He must have a connection, position, money, and so forth.

And yet his eye fell again on the window.

Suppose he made a bold stroke, and asked Miss Easton to marry him. She was as rich as could be, and had the best position in the town and county; and she was a great beauty. There was no one considered worthy to be compared to her.

But—his eye fell again on the window—no; he did not think—desirable as the match might be—that he should ever make an attempt in the direction of the Eastons. There was a rich widow who had been very kind to him; indeed, no one could be kinder. She had told him her

house was to be his home. He might go and drink tea with her this very night.

But that was not the subject-matter just now. A sweet, gentle girl, who would sit sewing opposite to him, and be the very embodiment of domestic felicity; who would keep his buttons stitched on, and regulate his grocery, and not let him be pillaged; who would be kind and affectionate, and a *companion*. He hesitated, in a curious way, about the last clause of the sentence. And did he know any such person? He had seen one twice every day since he had lived in Mrs. Perkins's apartment. A little figure had gone tripping by morning and evening, and a sweet face, with a pair of dove-like eyes, had been shyly turned to give him a glance. He wondered often what he was thinking about to dwell so much upon the fact, and what there was, when he came seriously to discuss the point, that was so interesting about her.

And how could he, who was on his pre-ferment, and with the world's tardy favor to be wrung from her—how could he suppose for a moment—that he could marry Ruth Smith? Nonsense! A girl without a sixpence in the world—without even connections!—daily governess to the children of the ironmonger just opposite.

He had seen Ruth Smith in her own house, divested of the well-worn straw hat, and the shawl that had done service many a season. He knew the soft dove-like eyes had a touch of innocent wonder in them that was irresistible; that her complexion was fair as a lily; that her hair was a rich auburn, and had a wave in it that was singularly beautiful; that she wore it coiled round her head in a way that was, to say the least of it, classical. Not that she knew, poor child, what the word classics meant. She had ground over the sentence often enough in the schoolroom, where she was daily governess to the ironmonger's children—"Homer, the prince of poets," etc., etc.; but this was all.

He knew the style of her home. He had done a little business for the grim aunt with whom she lived. He knew that Ruth was dependent on her, and had neither parent nor friend. The loneliness and precarious nature of her position had interested him from the first: for the grim aunt had sunk her money in an r



nulty. Horace had tried to shake this resolve of hers. He represented to her the needs of her orphan niece.

"When it should please Providence to remove the only protector she had, what will become of her?" he had said.

"She may do as she does now—earn her bread," was the reply, spoken without much feeling.

Since then, Horace had more tenderness for Ruth Smith than ever. He had been from home a week on business—he had only returned the day before—and he had missed Ruth Smith for the first time. Tired as he was, and perplexed with other cares, he did not forget to look out for her. But there was no Ruth. He could not think what was the reason. It was neither Easter, nor Christmas, nor any other holiday. Could she be ill?

All his thoughts and speculations began to drift in that direction. Like a rapid current, they bore him farther from Miss Easton and the rich widow than ever; and farther, the East Bramley people would say, from his own interests. Be that as it may, he changed his tactics. He would take his tea at home, and he rang for Mrs. Perkins. When he had finished tea, he would go out—where, he had not quite decided.

As the landlady set down his solitary cup and saucer, he began to ask her a few questions.

"Any thing stirring in the town, Mrs. Perkins, since I went away?"

"Not much, sir. There's been a wedding, and a funeral, close by here, sir."

"Whose wedding?" asked Horace, briskly.

"No one, sir, as you know. It was at the confectioner's shop at the corner; the young lady that waited behind the counter—"

"Oh," said Horace, in a very indifferent tone; "and what about the funeral?"

"I don't know as you'd mind much about that either. It was the old lady as lived in High Street—"

"High Street?" asked Horace, quickly.

"Yes, sir. It is not likely you should know her. A Miss Smith lived with her; the girl that goes by here to her teaching."

Horace turned very pale indeed. "Has any thing happened to Miss Smith?" he asked hastily.

"No, sir; oh no. It's the old lady that is dead."

"When?" asked Horace, in a tone of awe.

"The very day you went, sir. She died quite sudden in her chair."

"And Ruth—Miss Smith, I mean?" exclaimed Horace, aghast at the intelligence.

"Well, poor thing, I don't know much about her. She was at the funeral, I suppose. There wasn't any other mourners followed except herself and the doctor."

"How very distressing!" exclaimed Horace, almost in tears.

"You see, sir, she wasn't much liked in the place."

"Who wasn't?" interposed the lodger, sharply, and almost angrily.

"The old lady, sir. She was a very odd sort of person, and no one ever saw much of her. When folks don't make friends, of course they ain't to be had just for the asking," added Mrs. Perkins, logically.

"And where is the poor girl now?" asked Horace, feelingly, and with anxiety.

"At her own home, sir, for the present. She will have to leave, of course; but the funeral only took place yesterday."

"Dear me! that all this should have happened in one week!"

He did not say it before Mrs. Perkins. She had left the room, for the first-floor lodger was back, and wanted his dinner.

Horace was alone. "Poor Ruth!—poor girl! What a terrible position! What will become of her?"

It did not all at once come into his mind that he should go and comfort her, or that there was any absolute necessity for it.

An old servant was in the house, and the wife of the ironmonger had been there. So Mrs. Perkins told him, as she went.

His acquaintance with Ruth was very slight indeed. She had seldom spoken before him, except to say yes or no. Perhaps his visit might alarm her. It was sure to be talked of in the gossiping town of East Bramley. Sure and certain to be misrepresented. Why should he care for that? He was deeply sorry for the girl. How young, and innocent, and friendless she was! What a sad life was before her! He knew she would not have a farthing in the world!

It would never do for *him*, of course. Just the most disastrous step he could take. He wished he were rich, and could afford it; then he would transplant the poor little flower from where the rough winds would buffet it almost to death. But, nonsense! How could he marry, in his sober senses?

He was not thinking of marrying—he said it to himself, peevishly—but he might behave like a Christian man and a gentleman. He might step in, and see the poor thing in her affliction. Half an hour would not be ill spent in so doing. And he would set East Bramley at defiance.

## CHAPTER II.

### HE PASSES THE RUBICON.

OFFICE work had ended for the day. His time was his own, and he walked briskly along, rather in a state of excitement, if the truth were to be told. He wanted to see Ruth very much indeed.

His look of condolence was thrown away on the hard-featured woman who opened the door, and who was in mourning for her mistress.

"Oh, she is very well, thank you, sir," replied this individual, answering his question

about Ruth, to which question the look of condolence belonged.

"Miss Smith must have suffered greatly," said Horace, in the same feeling tone, as he stepped into the passage.

The woman made no reply, only she looked a trifle harder than before. Unfortunately, the heart of the young lawyer grew softer every moment. He went into the little room where Ruth was sitting in her desolation. It looked rather forlorn and neglected, but he did not dwell on this fact in the least. His whole attention was fixed on Ruth. She was seated at the table, the newspaper spread open before her. Her black dress made her look fairer than ever. Her hair had its usual lovely wave; her eyes were filled with tears.

The tears were what upset Horace's philosophy in the very beginning. He had never bargained with himself to be half so tender as he was when he took her hand and said—"Dear Miss Smith, I only knew last night. I should have come long before this, if I had."

He never forgot the look of joy that came into her face. "Oh, I knew you would! I felt sure you would!" exclaimed she, weeping and smiling together. "I wanted so to see you before I went."

"Went! Where are you going?" asked Horace, quickly.

"I am going to answer an advertisement for a governess. I have no home, now my aunt is dead."

There was something very touching in the girl's utter friendlessness, and yet the patient submission with which she said the words.

"Why can't you stay in East Bramley?" asked Horace, hastily.

"Because I am only daily governess, and I must have a place to live in."

"Won't Mrs. Mudford—" He stopped; he hardly knew what he meant or wished to say.

"No," said Ruth, sorrowfully; "she says she would take me if she could, but the house is small, and she has been wanting to make a change."

"Make a change?" repeated Horace.

"Yes, I am not quite sufficient governess, now the children are getting older. She wants them to learn more than I can teach them."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Horace, abruptly.

"Yes, because I am so sorry to leave the town and go among strangers. I love this place—I was born in it." And a tear trembled in her eye again.

"Where do you think of going to?" asked Horace, after a moment's pause.

"I hardly know. That is the advertisement I have just answered. It is a long way off."

"And only a very small salary and a great deal to do," rejoined Horace, reading it. "I can never think of letting you go."

She smiled and blushed. How pretty, how helpless, how forlorn she was! Could he let her go tossing and drifting away to a place

where she would be lost to him forever? What a wretched thing for her to be the drudge of the household for a sum of fifteen pounds a year! And perhaps be unkindly treated—*who* knows?

"I must go somewhere," continued Ruth. "I can't stay here more than a fortnight longer. And I have no money, except what Martha gives me. My aunt has left Martha the furniture."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Horace, indignantly.

"My aunt was very fond of Martha, and she never liked me," was the meek reply.

"And if you don't get the situation, what shall you do then?" asked Horace.

Ruth's eyes were turned upon him with that look of innocent wonder which was so charming.

"I don't know—I can't imagine," she replied.

"Ruth," said Horace, calmly, though his heart had never beat so fast in his life—"Ruth I can not let you go anywhere. You must stay *here—here, with me.*"

She trembled from head to foot. He saw she did. And she turned pale and red. He could see that she knew what he meant. And it was impossible to stop on that border-land, where to hesitate or to retract would be dishonorable.

He took her hand; his feelings were excited. It was love, he thought, and pity, and a desire to rescue the weak, all combined. His judgment, calmer and cooler, stood aloof while the deed was done. "You must stay, Ruth. Your home must be my home. You must be my *wife.*"

Unconsciously he assumed more the tone of command than of entreaty. He knew he should not be refused; he knew his offer would afford her what she needed—protection, a home, and affection.

Why did he put affection last? And was his happiness complete when he walked away the betrothed husband of Ruth Smith? What did his judgment say to it?

### CHAPTER III.

#### ON THE WAY.

"You look fagged out, ma'am! Let me hold the child."

"No, no!" and she clasped the child tighter, and spoke hurriedly and excitedly. Then, as if recollecting herself, she added, in a quieter tone, "No, thank you; I am not tired," and she looked down at the little fair-haired creature nestling in her arms.

"That's curious!" said the man, as if speaking to himself.

He was a decent-looking working-man, who was taking a long journey in search of employment—not so long a journey, however, as his fellow-traveller. She had been in the carriage a couple of hours when he got in.

She was a small spare woman, poorly, nay,

insufficiently, clothed; for, though it was autumn, the weather was stormy and winterly. Her black print gown and thin shawl did not keep out the cold, for now and then she shivered. But whatever her externals might be, there was something in her speech and manner that bespoke the lady.

tiny white face, and a pair of wondering blue eyes. It was as lovely a child as could be, in spite of its delicate, almost puny appearance. "A breath of wind might have blown it away," was a remark that had been more than once made of it.

The mother was a widow—you could see



"YOU MUST BE MY WIFE."

The man was not far wrong when he called her "ma'am."

Though she would not allow it, she must have been very weary. It was getting late in the gloomy autumn afternoon, and she had taken her ticket at six that morning.

Her child was a little fragile creature, with a

that by the cap under the poor shabby bonnet—a widow, and this her only child, perhaps the one tie which bound her to life!

Where she was going to no one could find out. Many questions had been put to her in the course of the day, but had elicited nothing. A bundle and a small box were her only lug-

gaze. And onward sped the whirling steam, from place to place, onward and onward. Yet the widow never moved. She was still on her way.

Once, when the train stopped, she said to the man who had spoken, "Is this East Bramley?"

"No, ma'am, not yet awhile. There's six more stations. I get out at the next."

She gave a little sigh of weariness. She was giving way, he thought. It went to his heart to see the pale face opposite, hour after hour.

"I wish I was going farther," said he, good-naturedly. "I could have been some help to you, maybe."

"I do not want help," replied she quietly.

He did not say any more. Her distant manner repelled him, but his heart was touched all the same. He could not but see how she wrapped her shawl round her, in the vain attempt to keep out the cold. Her child was better and more suitably clad than she was. It had on a warm cloak, trimmed with fur, and warm mittens, and a comforter round its neck. At the first glance you might have fancied it was the child of her mistress; but not at the second; the mother's love was apparent in every line of her face.

Six stations more, and the name was shouted up and down the platform—"East Bramley."

She got up at once. She was so stiff and benumbed that she could scarcely move. She handed out her bundle and the box; then she alighted with the child in her arms.

She stood a moment on the platform looking up and down with a half-bewildered air. Then she spoke to a porter who was passing. "Can you tell me where a—gentleman of the name of Easton lives?"

"Easton? Do you mean him as had a lot of money left him some time back, and used to live at the old house by the mill?"

"Yes—yes."

Though her usual demeanor was so quiet and patient, she had every now and then a quick, impetuous way with her. She had it at this moment.

"He's one of our first men," continued the porter, carelessly, and reading the address on the box; "he lives at Bramley Hall."

A look of surprise, anxiety, and alarm were blended in the woman's face. It would have been difficult to say which was uppermost.

"Thank you," she replied, taking up her bundle. "Is there a lodging close by?"

"Close as can be. Just over the way. You go through that door."

"Are they expensive—the lodgings I mean?" asked she timidly.

"No—oh no! I'll carry the box across. You see all this part of the town is new. That row of houses was not built two years ago. Mrs. Mason is the name. That's the card in the window."

"Thank you," she replied again.

He set down the box, and ran quickly away,

for the bell had rung, and another train was approaching. He left the widow standing in the street.

She stood a moment looking about her with the same half-bewildered air. Then the wind rushed by her with such a nipping blast, that she was glad to knock hastily at the door.

The lodging she took consisted of a bedroom only, and she took it for one night.

"Shall you like tea or dinner, or what?" asked the landlady, when the bargain was completed, and the stranger had taken possession.

"Nothing, thank you, except some milk and bread for the child."

"Poor little thing, how ill it looks," said the landlady, pityingly. She was herself the mother of seven.

"Ill! She is not ill," cried the widow, sharply; "she has never had a day's illness in her life."

"No offense—no offense!" said the landlady, quickly; and, with another glance at the child, "pray how old is she?"

"She will be two years old next month, bless her!" said the mother, fondly.

"Ah! you should see mine of that age. I've one that will be two in January. Such arms and legs she has! and such a color! Why, she can run about anywhere; but then mine are all hearty children, thank Heaven for it!"

The widow did not speak, nor did she begin to undress the child till the other mother was gone. Then she took off the little hat, and showed the full beauty of the golden curls; and she unfastened the cloak, and took off the comforter.

What a fragile creature it was that lay on her lap! What tiny arms it had! how thin and wasted! Its little hands were like those of an infant. The look of delicacy in its mite of a face was almost unearthly.

She sat with it in her lap, looking at it as it lay still half asleep. It was a yearning, heart-broken look. You might have fancied she would have burst into a flood of tears; but she did not. Her tears never lay very near, and perhaps their source had been dried up.

"She has never been ill," repeated the widow to herself, holding an oft-recurring argument with her fears; "and I was a little puny child, and difficult to rear. Besides—"

A look of sharp distress came into her face. Surely she will weep; but she does not.

The child by this time was fully awake. It opened its large wondering eyes, and began to look round.

"Mamma."

"Yes, my darling—my sweet one—my treasure!" and she kissed it and pressed it nearer to her.

The wondering eyes—blue they were as heaven—took note of every thing. Something seemed to be absent.

The child turned to her mother, and said, with a plaintive cry, "Papa—papa!"

Again the widow pressed the child to her heart.

"Ethel, papa is in heaven!" and she looked upward—"in heaven, with God and the angels."

The child's eyes followed the direction of the mother's, and were raised upward. The little face looked so pure, so frail, so ethereal, you might have fancied the spirit was about to wing its way upward too.

The mother knew it might be so in her heart; she dare not gainsay the fact. Her child rarely laughed; it had a smile of almost angelic sweetness; it would sit quiet for hours; it was obedient and good and loving; for its age she thought it was a prodigy. It could understand all that was said to it; it lisped its little prayer morning and night, its small hands reverently put together; she almost dreaded to see it, it looked so unlike all that appertains to this grosser world; it was never fretful, and had never been absolutely ill. But the doctor had shaken his head, and said something about want of stamina; that the best of living was needed, and the best of care.

"She can not rough it," the doctor said, "like other children. She is a hot-house plant by nature. If she has to rough it, she will die."

This speech had made the widow desperate. She could not screen her child. What shelter had she for herself?

But a step was on the stairs. She was of a reserved, sensitive nature; she laid the child on the bed, and drew the coverlet over it; she could scarcely bear the woman of the house to see it; she did not want the little wasted arms and tiny hands to be remarked upon. It was like touching a wound that festered.

But a struggle arose in her mind. She could not let the night slip by without doing her errand. The very purpose and gist of the journey lay in that errand. And she must leave the child in charge of a stranger.

The stranger was as kind as could be. When the child had eaten and was laid to rest, she offered to sit by it.

"My little ones are in bed and asleep," said she, "and my husband is out. Go your ways, ma'am. I'll see to the bantling."

The mother had scarce tasted bit or sup. Her lips were too dry. She was too fevered with anxiety.

But she was obliged to go, there was no evading it. No possibility of lingering longer.

When she was gone, the landlady sat down by the bed. With a look of mingled curiosity and compassion, she raised the coverlet, and looked at the tiny arms and the small wasted body.

"Ah!" said she, laying it hastily down, as if ashamed of what she had done, "there is no doubt about it. The bantling will die!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### COULD THIS BE MARGARET?

THE woman, stranger though she seemed, knew every step of the way. She did not go direct to the point. An irresistible influence seized upon her. She hurried along in the direction of the old mill.

As she hurried, she often pressed her hand to her heart. Once she stopped, and gasped as if for breath; and once she bowed her head, and joined her hands as if in prayer; then, she hurried on again.

The old mill was in a rather lonely spot in the suburbs of the town. It was forsaken and disused. An old dilapidated house stood beside it. The house had no inhabitants, it was disused as well. She glanced at the blank uncurtained windows. She could only see them by the light of a pale fitful moon, that went and came every moment, as the clouds drove by. She lingered a few moments. Once she tried the door, as if she would have entered, but it was locked. Her time was short; the chimes of the town clocks were brought clear and distinct by the wind; she could not stay any longer.

What was there in the lonely spot so dear to her? Why did she wish to stay?

The winds might have answered the question as they came hurrying by to expend their fury on the bleak open yonder. There was no other reply.

She drew her shawl round her, and went away. Soon she had quitted that part of the town. Now she came upon a broad turnpike, which lay white and bare in the moonlight, and down which the wind swept right in her teeth. But she battled on bravely. The energy of the woman was wonderful.

Her thoughts had wandered lately from her child, but they went back to it as to a centre of attraction. She could see the small white face and golden clustering hair, the tiny hands and little wasted arms; and as she thought, she grew brave, and set the wind at naught.

By-and-by she turned down a narrow lane. Her walk was nearly ended. In the moonlight, looking like some black frowning castle of the olden time, was Bramley Hall.

When she saw it, she paused as if to take breath. She pressed her hand to her heart, and looked up as if to the Strong for strength.

Very soon she stood under a heavy stone portico, and had reached out her hand to ring; but ere she did so, another sharp conflict took place. She glanced at her shabby dress, and moved a few steps away.

Which of the two entrances ought she to choose?

"Oh, this one!" And she came back with a flush on her face, and a slight curl on her lip. Nothing should force her to take the other.

A servant-man answered the bell. He stared at her with more surprise than civility.

"Is Miss Easton at home?" asked the woman in a faltering voice,

"She's engaged, my good woman. Besides, this is the wrong door for such as you; you should have gone—"

He stopped. There was a flush on the cheek, and the head was raised proudly. Something told him that in spite of appearances the stranger was a lady.

"Miss Easton has a party to-night, and can't see any one," added the man, rather puzzled, and in a more respectful tone.

"I will not detain her. I only want to speak to her a few moments. I have come a long, long way," said the woman in a pleading tone. The look of wounded pride had vanished almost as soon as it came.

"Oh, I do not want to hinder you from seeing her. Janet!" added he, turning to a young woman who was passing. "Here's a person says she must see Miss Easton."

"She can't, till my mistress has done dressing," replied Janet, "if the person likes to wait in the cloak-room—"

"Thank you, I do not mind waiting," said the stranger hastily, and stepped in.

"Come, then, this is the way. Oh, I see you know it!" said Janet in a tone of surprise. "You knew Miss Easton, perhaps."

"I have seen her," stammered the stranger, who had become deadly pale.

"Well, sit there a bit by the fire; you look bad enough, anyhow. There's my mistress's bell. She'll soon be down now," and Janet bustled off again.

The stranger sat down, and glanced half fearfully round the room. It was a small room, and had an old-fashioned mirror over the mantel-piece, and a solitary picture on the wall. The picture might have been placed here to be out of sight and memory. The woman looked at it with a half-smile. It was the portrait of a young girl with a profusion of golden hair, and blue eyes which had rather a pensive expression. There was a wreath of roses on her head, and roses were at her feet. A name was written under the portrait—"Margaret, on her seventeenth birthday."

She was looking at the picture, when a step was heard. At the sound of it she started and trembled, and sunk into her chair. The next moment, a lady entered the room—no more terrific object than that. The lady was young—younger, to judge from appearance, by twenty years at least, than the stranger. She was richly dressed. Her silken train swept the ground, and she had jewels in her hair, and on her neck and arms. No, she was not the Margaret of the picture. Her hair was black, and her face, though very handsome, had sternness and decision in it. There was a trace of likeness, but no more.

She came in clasping her bracelet, and rather in haste. She gave a hurried glance towards the stranger, but there was not the least recognition. There never would have been, if the stranger had not said, "Adela!"

The golden bracelet dropped on the floor.

She picked it up again. She rarely lost her self-possession. She laid the bracelet on the table, and her keen black eyes were riveted on the stranger.

Gradually, light broke in upon the darkness. A fact forced itself on her mind that was very startling and unexpected. The woman was her sister!

She advanced a step—without, however, holding out her hand. She was evidently perplexed as to what she should do. She had to take a few moments to consider, then it came into her mind what the right thing was. She took the forlorn woman in her arms and kissed her. It was not a warm embrace, and when it was over the sisters stood apart again.

"Things have gone hard with you, Margaret," said the richer sister coldly, and evidently embarrassed by the presence of the poorer one. "It is as we thought—that wretched marriage!"

"It was not wretched; it was happy and blessed," replied the other eagerly. "He was the best, the kindest, the dearest—"

She broke down, and hid her face in her hands. Again you looked for tears, but they came not. When she raised her head, the other saw how it was.

She caught sight of the badge of widowhood, and said hastily, almost with exultation, "Ah! he is dead!"

She was sorry when she had said it; but she had been taught to look upon him as the marplot of the family.

Again the sisters were silent. The widow bent her head, as though some wintry blast were passing over it. A perplexing question was rising to the lips of Adela: "What was her sister's errand?"

Could she look at her and ask it? Did she not come for help—for money—perhaps for refuge? And would their father ever grant it?

The marriage had taken place some years ago, when Adela was a child at school.

She had never been told all the particulars. She knew that Margaret's lover had no wealth, or even a position; that his profession was a very precarious one. He had been an artist, and what (as the old man said) could be more unsatisfactory than that?

In fact, he was opposed to the attachment altogether.

It was never clearly known by Adela whether her sister's disobedience was absolute and willful. Whether in despite of her father's will she married Ernest Seymour—for this was the name of her lover. At any rate, she married him from her own home. But her father never forgave it. When she was on her wedding journey, he wrote and told her so; and he forbade her to return, on any pretext whatever.

The more he mused on the subject, the more bitter he became concerning it.

And Margaret's husband was not successful; that was the crowning offense. If he had made a lucky hit—painted some picture that



would have proved his fortune, and taken the world by surprise, the offense might have been forgiven, and the stone of stumbling rolled away. But, alas! it was not so.

He was direly unsuccessful. He had talent—so, at least, his wife imagined—but the world

heart did their worst, and he was carried to the grave.

What a life she had had—that girl crowned with roses! That once happy Margaret!

Would the old man forgive? Would he take her to his heart and home again? Would her



"IT IS AS WE THOUGHT—THAT WRETHED MARRIAGE!"

never recognized it. He painted pictures, but they did not sell. He was reduced from one extremity to another. He tried teaching, but it failed. Perhaps he had not the requisite patience; perhaps he lacked perseverance. His wife let no one into the secret; it was buried with him when, at last, sickness and a broken

wounds be healed, her sorrows wiped away? Would it all end happily, as in some story-book or fable? Adela feared not.

She knew how inflexible he was, and how unforgiving. She knew the very mention of the name of Margaret was forbidden.

What was she to do? What could be re-

quired of her? It was a new and puzzling experience.

The sisters had been strangers all their lives. When Adela was a child, Margaret had been a woman. Adela could just remember the Margaret of old. She could recall the shining locks and the blue eyes, undimmed then, and not sunken with grief and weary vigils.

It puzzled her to imagine by what process the change had taken place.

Could this, indeed, be Margaret?

## CHAPTER V.

### MARGARET'S REQUEST.

MARGARET read what her sister was thinking. She was quick and apt to decipher expressions, and the whole argument lay before her clear as daylight. She was prepared for the question asked with perplexity and even shame: "What brings you here? What is it you want?"

"Nothing for myself," was the quick reply. "Nothing—nothing!"

Adela glanced at the shabby dress and the worn face, and she said, with a touch of feeling, "I know what ought to be done. I would do it myself. I would say come—come, at once, to our home and hearts. But my father—"

"You need not tell me. I know! I know!" interrupted Margaret, quickly.

"Have you ever written to him?—have you ever tried that means?" resumed Adela. "Perhaps—"

"Once," again interrupted the other quickly—"once I did, when my husband was in his last illness; in one terrible strait I wrote."

"And did he answer?"

"No!"

Again that troubled expression on Adela's face. What could her sister want of her? Ah, it could be but one thing, say what she might. And she began to play with her golden bracelet.

But one thing—*money*. Well, she would give her money—as much, at least, as she could spare. And there was no time to lose. The sooner this interview came to an end the better.

Margaret guessed as much by a kind of intuition. She knew her sister wanted to be rid of her; that the company was coming, and the old hall would be gay with lights and music.

There was no place for her here, not even for the sole of her foot. Well, she would go, but not till she had told her errand. And she would tell it at once, briefly and boldly.

She had a little daughter. (Here the warm flush came on her cheek, and the mother's love shone in her eyes.) The child was unfit to struggle with its lot—it was so delicate, so fragile. Its very life hung in the balance. She could not screen it, or give it the care it needed. Might she place it here, in comfort and security, while she struggled out yonder for her bread? There was no gainsaying the fact of how hard that struggle would be.

She spoke with great earnestness. The pleading tones of her voice were scarcely to be resisted.

Adela was not unmoved, but she was astonished at the request. Indeed, it seemed at first impossible to entertain it for a moment. "If your child came here," she said at length, half bewildered at the idea, "you would have to part with it. How can you bear that, Margaret?"

Margaret pressed her hand to her heart. "Yes, I can bear it," replied she slowly, and as if the concession were wrung from her by an agony of dread lest the child should die.

Adela stood silent and thoughtful. This was a newer experience still. "Where is your child?" asked she.

"Here, in the town. You can see her. If only you see her, you will love her. Do you think I could bear to see her waste away and die?—that I could leave her long hours alone, she who wants such care and tending? Oh, Adela, my sister Adela, have pity on me, and help to save my child!"

Adela had pity; but she was sorely perplexed.

A sound of horses' feet, and a ring at the bell, broke short the conference.

"Oh, I must go!" cried she, starting from her reverie—"I must go, Margaret, but I will see you again. Where? Quick! Tell me where?"

Margaret told her. She had the address written down, and she gave it to her sister.

Adela would see her in the morning, without fail. And here was a piece of gold. That, surely, would heal some sorrows. But Margaret would not take the gold—she went away, leaving it behind her.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BRINGING HOME THE BRIDE.

HORACE VINCENT had been married a fortnight, and had just brought home his bride. Whether for good or evil, for weal or for woe, the deed was done, and was past recall. He had taken the house, and furnished it. He had made all his arrangements; in haste, it is true, but Ruth's position demanded that it should be so, else she had been left without even a shelter. As it was, she had fled into this tower of refuge and was safe.

At this starting-point of his married life, Horace thought he was very happy indeed. Here was the sweet loving girl to sit opposite to him, and to make his home happy; to be his dear companion and solace in this working weary world.

Why did he, even now, hesitate at that word *companion*? Why did he break off the web of his speculations abruptly, and with a kind of mental reservation?

How bright and cheerful every thing looked, on that first evening! Every thing was new,



and sparkling, and untried. Horace had furnished the house well, and with taste. "It is better do it well in the beginning," he had said. And when a feeling of anxiety came into his mind as to the cost, he would meet it by another observation. "I am getting on; I shall soon make it all right," he would say. "Besides, I shall have a wife to look after my affairs. Of course all ladies understand housekeeping. It is their vocation."

On this head he had no doubts whatever. Still there were many thoughts that were inclined to harass him. He would like to tell Ruth exactly how he stood. He would like to hear her say that she was mistress of the position; that his views were her views.

Once or twice she had let drop a remark which had led him to suppose that she fancied his riches were unlimited. He must deceive her on that head. And what time more suitable than now?—now, when they were both starting in life—when to blunder would be most embarrassing, if not disastrous?

He had lighted up the gas, for it was getting dark. Dinner was over, and he was sitting by his own fireside, hearing her sing. She sang very sweetly. He had bought her a new piano, and her nimble fingers went running up and down the keys. "I soon get tired of playing," she said, rising abruptly; "it reminds one so of the days of one's drudgery; and I never liked music."

"Come here, Ruth, and sit by me. I love music passionately. I have promised myself the pleasure of hearing you sing every night."

"I want to make some wax flowers. My aunt had me taught. It is the only occupation I really like," said she, making no answer to his observation.

"What do we want wax flowers for?" asked he, in rather a dismayed tone.

"Oh, I shall make a group for the middle of the drawing-room table. I can get all the materials at that new shop."

He was silent a minute. "Are the materials expensive, Ruth?"

"Oh, no—not very."

"Because," said he, gravely, "my little wife must not fancy she has married a rich man. We must live carefully, and be very industrious, and then perhaps we can afford to make wax flowers by-and-by."

She laughed. "Horace, you must make a little sketch of the bouquet before you go to-morrow. The first thing after breakfast I shall set off—"

"Stay, Ruth; it is time, dear, we had a little talk together. There will be a great deal for you to do without buying materials for wax flowers."

"What shall I have to do?" And her eyes were turned upon him with innocent wonder.

"There will be household matters, dear. I don't pretend to understand them, but of course you do. You are a first-rate housekeeper, are you not, little woman?"

She laughed again. "You are, Ruth?" he asked, with some anxiety.

"I don't know much about housekeeping, Horace. You forget I was a governess."

He was silent a few minutes, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"Martha did all the housekeeping," continued Ruth. "My aunt said she could not pretend to be troubled with teaching me."

He was still silent.

"And of course, now I have a servant of my own, I can do the same," said Ruth triumphantly.

He was silent a few more minutes. There was an odd sensation in his mind, or rather a mixture of sensations, which he could not exactly explain or understand.

"Ruth," said he at length, "when young people such as you and I are beginning life, there is nothing like prudence and economy. I am not rich. I told you so before. My whole income is not more than one hundred and fifty pounds at present."

"Oh, but that is a great deal, Horace," said she, still triumphantly. "My aunt had not nearly so much. I call you quite a rich man."

"With your good management, dearest, I may be one. A man who lives within his income, and puts by a little every year, is in my opinion rich. What do you say, Ruth?"

She was not listening to him in the least.

"And if I get on and do well, we may be able to take a larger house, and be in rather a different position. There is an old saying, Ruth, that a man must ask his wife how he is to live."

"I don't want a better house, Horace. I think this is delightful. I like to look out on the market-place. It is as cheerful again as High Street was."

"But you would like me to succeed?"

"I don't know. I am quite satisfied with you as you are."

And the smile with which the words were spoken was so sweet, that all other thoughts were driven out of his head. Nor did he venture any further remarks on domestic economy the whole of the evening.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SHADOWS ON THE HEARTH.

THE next few days Horace abandoned himself to all the joys of home. If he thought of his own affairs at all, it was seldom, and in a cursory manner. If, now and then, the old misgiving haunted him, and judgment whispered that he had been precipitate, he silenced the whisper, and laid the misgiving to rest.

Ruth was charming. She excelled even his expectations. She was so loving, so tender, so playful, so thoroughly contented with her home, so like to the ideal he had pictured, that nothing seemed wanting in his cup of felicity. To

be sure, his domestic arrangements were not so perfect as could be wished; but time would work wonders. Only time was wanted!

On Sunday he went to church with his bride. He was very proud of her indeed. He thought his friends must see and admire her perfections as he did. He felt sure that they would, one and all, pay their respects to her on the following week, when Ruth, having made her appearance, was to sit for company.

He took a great deal of trouble to explain matters to her on the Monday morning, as they sat at breakfast; for Ruth failed to view things exactly in the right light.

"Now, Ruth, you must know that there are some people in East Bramley whose acquaintance we must cultivate."

"I hope the Mudfords will call," said she, balancing her spoon on the rim of her cup.

He frowned a little. He had not desired any further acquaintance with the Mudfords.

"They are the only people I care about," said she. "I don't know any body else in the place."

"But, Ruth, don't you see I am trying to get a connection? And the Mudfords are not exactly— Well, of course, they can call," added he, remembering the kindness of the ironmonger's wife to Ruth in the hour of her distress; "but there are the Eastons."

"Oh, that proud, stuck-up Miss Easton! I can't bear her!"

Horace frowned again.

"And there is Mrs. Jules, who is quite an old friend of mine. I am particularly anxious that she should continue to be on terms with me. I want Mrs. Jules to like you, Ruthy."

"I don't much care whether she does or not."

"But you should care, for my sake," said he, reproachfully.

"And I hate having formally to receive company. You know how nervous I am. I shall run away, and shut myself up."

"That will be very foolish, Ruth. I beg you will do nothing of the kind."

The nearest approach which he had yet seen to a pout appeared on the smiling lips of Ruth.

"I have very important business at the office this morning—I can not neglect it," he continued; "but I will be back as soon as possible. If any one comes while I am away, you will entertain them, Ruth."

"I suppose Jane knows what to do," said Ruth, as she got up and went to the window. "I am sure I don't."

"About what?" asked Horace, alarmed.

"About the wine and cake and things. I have never received company before, or been with any one either. I don't know!"

He stood a minute, a look of blank dismay on his face. Then he said, "We don't leave these things to servants, my dear."

She shrugged her shoulders with a touch of impatience.

"If you will come with me, Ruth, we will ar-

range matters a little. What is all that litter on the drawing-room table?"

"Those are the wax flowers I am making."

"You are resolved to make them, then?" said he, in a tone of surprise.

"I don't see why I should not."

There was a touch of self-will in her voice and manner which jarred upon him. But he controlled himself; he was very patient with her. He cleared away the litter, set out the bride-cake and the wine, and gave all the requisite orders, wondering very much at the strange position in which he found himself.

Then, he went to his office, for he was late, and punctuality was important. He ran all the way. He had a strange sinking at his heart. He had left her sitting at the window, smiling and lovely. The little cloud had vanished almost as soon as it came; but yet his heart sank—but yet his judgment said clearly now, and not in a whisper—"You have married in haste." He would not allow the sentence to be finished—"How if you should repent at leisure?"

His business matters were very protracted that morning. He could not get away till late. He felt anxious and worried—home cares mixed with those of a business nature. Already the shadow of a great burden was coming upon him.

As he was hurrying home, to his great surprise he met Ruth. She came up smiling, and looking all sweetness and amiability.

"Why, Ruth, I thought you were at home, expecting people to call. Pray, has there been any one?"

"Oh, yes; but I got so tired! Mrs. Mudford came."

"Any body else?"

"The Mortimers."

He looked vexed. These Mortimers were friends of the Mudfords.

"Was that all?"

"Oh, no; a lady in a grand carriage. Not Miss Easton."

"Mrs. Jules?" said Horace eagerly.

"Yes, she came; but I was frightened, and told Martha to say I was engaged."

"Ruth, you never mean to tell me you did any thing so foolish and so wrong?"

"I can't help it"—and there was the touch of self-will again—"it's how my aunt did, when she did not want to see any one."

"But when you know Mrs. Jules is my friend—Oh, Ruth, Ruth! what have you done?" cried he, in a tone of distress.

She walked on, smiling and unconcerned.

"And who else have you sent away?" he asked bitterly.

"No one, only Miss Easton. She came a few minutes after. I was more frightened at her than at Mrs. Jules. She was driving her ponies."

He did not speak. He looked very stern, and very angry.

"So you have offended two of my best friends, and altogether forgotten your good-manners!" said he, as they reached the door of their house.

She looked up with one of her brightest smiles. His words did not affect her in the least.

"I told you I did not want any friends but you," she said tenderly.

For once the smile was lost upon him, and the tenderness as well.

the matter altogether. It will be a thorny path at best. But for my duty?"

Adela thought it, as she stood, in her room, endeavoring to regain her composure. She had a high sense of duty, which was well. By degrees, a holier principle might be felt, which would make the path of duty easier and pleasanter.



"BUT YOU SHOULD CARE FOR MY SAKE!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ADELA'S PRAYER.

"PERHAPS I have been too selfish and worldly. Perhaps this is an appeal to me to make some sacrifice for others. I could dispense with

"If you please, Miss Easton, the master is calling for you everywhere," said a maid, as she tapped hastily at the door. "There's a carriage in the drive now."

Adela opened the door, and stepped hastily into the corridor to meet her father.

"Adela, this is not usual with you. The guests arriving and no mistress to receive them!"

He was a handsome man, in spite of his age. His figure was tall and stately; he had even a military air; but he had never been in the army. He had been the owner of a mill.

Adela murmured a hasty excuse; and he offered her his arm, as they walked down the corridor. He had a stiff and stately courtesy, which distinguished him at all times. The common people used to call him "Gentleman Easton." Adela would have liked a few moments more of retirement; her mind felt confused and stunned; but it was not to be thought of just then. She had barely time to receive her guests.

She was not happy. How could she be? Her heart was not here, amid this flutter of laces and rustling of trains. It was far, far away! Happily, her self-control was not easily shaken, else she had made a bad hostess that night. She was heartily glad when the entertainment was over. She had her father's iron constitution, and scarce knew what weariness meant; but the effort to keep up under the pressure that was upon her mind was hard work; her head ached. She longed to sit quiet in her room, and think over what she would have to do.

It was of no use discussing the matter with her father that night. Her plans were not matured, and the hour was too late. She rarely risked any thing by precipitancy. She did not attempt to go to rest as usual. She sat in her room, her hand pressed to her forehead, and in deep and anxious thought.

What right had one sister to all these comforts and luxuries, when the other wanted bread? The very fact of how sumptuously she was lodged and fed pained her, when out in the bleak world, friendless, and perhaps homeless, was Margaret!

She would like to take Margaret's child to her heart. People said it was a cold heart, and proud. Certainly, it was a heart which had neither given nor received much tenderness at present.

Her father was polite, but never tender. She had no bosom friend who was as her own soul. She held aloof from the circle of acquaintance who flattered round her. In her secret life she was often solitary and unsatisfied. There was no trace of this to be seen—but there it was.

A little infantile creature to cling to her, and be loved and cherished. Her sister's child—of the same flesh and blood with herself. Something that she could shelter and defend, and perhaps save. She would have liked this.

She would lose no time in laying the matter before her father. She would ask him the very next morning if she might adopt Margaret's child. It was a daring question, and she could hardly guess the result. But there was a kind of intrepidity in Adela's nature, and it would stand her in good stead.

She rose early—indeed, her anxiety would not let her sleep. She had armed herself at all points.

The breakfast-table was never enlivened by much conversation. Mr. Easton was of a silent, reserved habit; and he had his letters to read, and also the *Times*.

When the meal was over, and the table had been cleared, Adela's hour had come: it was now or never. While she thought so, her father rose and threw away the paper.

"I must go, Adela. I wonder if my horse is ready. I ordered it to the door at nine."

"Going—where?" asked Adela, somewhat anxious and alarmed.

"To meet Sir Frederick Morton, at Bolton Gate." He wants me to ride over that piece of land with him. I shall, perhaps, bring him back to lunch."

Adela was standing. She laid her hand on the back of the chair. "Can you spare me a few minutes?" she asked; "I wish to speak to you."

"I am in a hurry, Adela. Keep what you have to say till I come back."

"Our clock is fast, and I will not detain you long. When you return it will be too late."

"Indeed! what is it then?"

He was standing opposite to her. They were looking full into each other's faces.

"I have seen Margaret."

She said it so calmly, in such a steady voice, that the whole import of the words did not occur to him.

"Whom have you seen, Adela?"

"Margaret—my sister, and your daughter."

A moment longer he stood silent and unconvinced. Then a dark threatening expression came into his face—an expression that Adela had never seen before. But she was not dismayed; she stood her ground. The courage of her nature rose in proportion to the demand made upon it.

"Have you then dared—" he began, but she would not hear him finish.

"I have dared nothing but what my relationship to Margaret justifies. Do you know that she is a widow, and in distress?"

"And if she is, what right have you to know it?" said he vindictively.

Adela's eyes met his eyes steadily. She never quailed an instant.

"Yesterday a woman, poorly dressed and in want, came and asked to see me. I could not have believed it, but, papa, that woman was Margaret."

"Ah, I told her that she would want bread!" cried he, still vindictively.

"She did not ask for money. I offered it, but she refused," replied Adela calmly.

"What did she come for?"

"To ask a favor of me. I wish to grant it; my heart urges me powerfully. But I have always been obedient—I can not do it without your consent."

The closing remark somewhat pacified him.

He told her she was right. Indeed he said a few words in praise of her dutiful behavior.

"You flatter me," replied she, "by your good opinion. Well, then, my wish is this: I wish to adopt Margaret's child."

Adela was very plain-spoken. She had a habit of coming to the point at once. In this case the effect was rather startling. He looked at her as if he could not rightly have understood her meaning.

During the momentary calm, she went on her way steadily, and without regard to what might come hereafter. "Margaret has come to us from a depth of poverty and wretchedness such as we can scarce imagine possible for one of our race, our own flesh and blood. She will return to it. Heaven help her! We may never see or hear from her again. But the innocent child, who is too weak to struggle as she must struggle, who has done us no ill, and only suffers for the faults of others—may I not rescue it? I am willing. I hold out my hand. It may be, papa, we shall both of us find our dying pillows easier, if we do not suffer this little one to drift away from us and perish!"

Adela had full knowledge of her father's disposition, and used the knowledge skillfully. He liked the expression, "suffering for the faults of others." It implied that blame might be attached to Margaret; and he was pleased that Adela did not offer herself as champion for her sister. He did not war with a child; he had no feelings towards it of any kind; added to which, the allusion to his last hour sobered his irritation. The stern man of the world had an untold dread of death. "You must give me time, Adela," he said, in a softened tone. "I must consider the matter."

"I have no time to give you," she replied; "the mother goes to-day. She is in some poor lodging where she slept last night. You forget that she must labor for her bread."

"It is her own seeking. She has made her own fortune," he replied coldly, "and I will not hear her name. I have told you so before."

"You shall not," said Adela calmly; "we will speak only of the child."

Her resolute manner and steadfast eye held him to the point, in spite of his reluctance. It was his own nature reflected in hers. It was as well, he thought, to decide at once. He was prompt as she was. It would not take him long. She might leave him for half an hour, and return.

She left him, softly closing the door after her. She went to her room, and shut herself in. With all her outward calmness, she was deeply agitated. Her soul yearned to her sister's child. How empty and frivolous her life seemed to have been, now this new interest had come! How tender were the thoughts suggested to her mind! What a fountain of affection was opened up in this arid spot!

She could not save both. Alas! the mother had drifted too far away. Perhaps, if she were to try, both would be lost. But if she took the

narrow path of duty, the other blessing might perchance be added. It was the beginning, not of evil, but of good.

And in the deep consciousness of want—want of a better wisdom, and strength, and persistence than her own—and in a consciousness, too, of new and untried perils and responsibilities, she fell on her knees and prayed. It was the first earnest, heartfelt prayer she had ever offered.

## CHAPTER IX.

### WHY SHOULD NOT SHE MARRY?

SHE was summoned back to her father sooner than she expected. He was standing just where she left him. He had not moved, she thought, an inch.

It was a crisis in Adela's history; one she had come upon suddenly, and without the slightest expectation. Who would have thought this yesterday?

She advanced with a firm step. When she was opposite her father, she laid her hand again on the back of the chair. She waited for him to speak first. When he did speak, his voice sounded very harsh.

"I have considered your proposition, Adela. Before I give my decision, may I ask if you have weighed well the consequences of the step?"

"I have," she replied firmly.

"Suppose you should marry?"

"It is not likely," said she coldly.

"I see no reason against it, at your age, and with money and position—"

"We will not discuss that point," she interrupted. "I am willing to run the risk."

"You are? Well, it is no concern of mine. I do not want you to marry."

She was silent.

"But I will not have the child forced on me. You must keep it out of my sight."

"The house is large enough," she replied.

"And—that woman—must not come on any pretext whatever. If I find that she does, I will send the child to the work-house."

"Very well, sir, she shall not come."

"I think I may trust you, Adela?"

"I think you may."

"And you will never mention to me—her—her name—or hold the slightest communication with her?"

"I will not mention it. I will hold no communication."

"And whatever happens to you—whether change, or sickness, or death—I refuse to undertake any responsibility. The child's welfare depends on you, and you alone. I would turn it out as easily as I would crush an insect."

She shuddered. His harshness was very terrible; and to oppose it would be to chafe against the sharp edges of a rock.

"The child itself may die," said she aloud, a moment after.

"So much the better. It may be taken from the evil to come."

She could not bear it much longer—the tears gushed to her eyes. If his heart was adamant, hers was human. A sword would hardly have pierced it as his words did.

She turned as if to go. He had given permission. What need was there to stay any longer? He did not stop her. He waited till she was gone, and then rang the bell and ordered his horse.

He was late at his appointment, and yet he rode slowly—in fact, he had half a mind to turn his horse's head and ride back again. He had done a very silly thing, and one which he already wished undone. Why should not Adela marry? The idea had never struck him with such force before. How handsome she had looked as she stood opposite to him! And she was rich. No girl in the county would have a better portion.

He had wished both his girls to marry well; and he ground his teeth as he thought of Margaret. Now he had only Adela left, and he would take care of her.

Why did he let her fasten that clog round her neck? He ought to have forbidden it. The child would never be claimed, and he gave a short bitter laugh. It was not likely; and Adela—something told him that she was not the woman to forsake a trust. There was a stern fidelity about her that was ominous.

He would ride back at once. But, no, that was impossible without breaking his word to Sir Frederick, and Sir Frederick was yonder riding to meet him.

He was not alone; Mr. Sibley, his agent and confidant, was with him.

"Sir Frederick began to think you late," said Mr. Sibley, as the gentlemen met and exchanged civilities. "Oh dear! he is the soul of punctuality."

"I was detained," replied Mr. Easton, casting a cold, slight look on the agent; "but I am now quite at your service."

"And very valuable it is to have such a friend and adviser," continued the agent, in a fawning tone. "I was just saying to Sir Frederick—"

"The fact is," said Sir Frederick, breaking through his agent's speech, with a cheerful, manly voice that was pleasant to listen to—"the fact is I am just a wee bit bothered, and I was sure you would advise for the best."

"That I will," replied Mr. Easton, heartily. He liked the young baronet thoroughly. He liked his frank open countenance and clear gray eyes, and straightforward honest manner.

It was impossible, he thought, to be deceived in a face like that. The agent he detested, and he was not alone in that feeling.

"The case lies in a nutshell," continued Sir Frederick. "You see that sweep of land, those fields, and that pretty homestead yonder; you could not have a better view anywhere than from here."

"I see. The land that belongs to the Ormonds—"

"They rent it," interrupted the agent, hastily.

"I thought it was their own. I thought the old man, their father, left it them in his will. But I really know very little of my neighbors' affairs."

"He did leave it them," continued Mr. Sibley; "and, oh! do just mark the wickedness of mankind. He knew it was not his own to leave. It was Sir Frederick Morton's."

"How came that about?" asked Mr. Easton.

"It was part of the Morton estate, but the late lamented baronet mortgaged it—the Ormonds choose to say sold it to them—at any rate they refuse to give it up. My respected patron—"

"There—there—that will do!" cried Sir Frederick, cutting him short.

"Because, don't you see," continued the agent, not in the least abashed by the rebuke, and still addressing Mr. Easton—"don't you see how beautiful it is with the rest of the estate? It is a gem missing from the crown!"

"It is a nice bit of land—very," said Mr. Easton, approvingly.

"So it is, and it ought not to be separate from the rest. I tell Sir Frederick that for the sake of his descendants he ought to claim it; and I really think he will."

"Buy it, you mean," suggested Sir Frederick.

"But if the young people refuse to sell it—'As firm as an Ormond,' has passed into a proverb here," insinuated the agent.

"I know very little of these Ormonds," said Mr. Easton, in that cold, distant tone he assumed when speaking of strangers. "Pray who or what are they?"

"Two very nice young people," replied the agent, to whom the question was addressed, "very nice, indeed," and he mouthed the words as if he was talking of a sugar-plum.

"Husband and wife?"

"No, brother and sister. They have just lost their father, and their mother died years ago. In fact, they are orphans."

"Which makes me resolve to do them every justice," said Sir Frederick gravely, and almost sadly.

## CHAPTER X.

### "THIS UNLUCKY BUSINESS."

WE left Sir Frederick discussing with Mr. Sibley the matter of the Ormonds' estate. If the brother and sister were orphans, there was all the more reason that justice should be done them.

Sir Frederick was an orphan too, and wore deep mourning. By the death of his father he had just come into the estate.

"Justice! why, my dear patron—"

"Keep to the point, sir; keep to the point,"



said Sir Frederick impatiently. "We were discussing the Ormonds."

"Exactly," continued the agent, with undisturbed equanimity, "exactly. Oh, I was saying," and he turned to Mr. Easton, "there is a tall big fellow, six feet high. You must know him—Luke Ormond."

Mr. Easton shook his head. The meadow farm, as it was called, was not in the parish of East Bramley.

"I don't so much wonder at your not knowing Luke, either," resumed the agent; "he goes out very little indeed. I believe he hates going out. He is generally lying all his length on a sofa in his study, as he calls it, at the back of the house. That is where you will find Luke."

"Is he an invalid?"

"Not a bit of it!"

"Who manages the farm, then?"

"My dear Mr. Easton, I am surprised at you, and a little shocked. Do you mean to say that you are in ignorance of Kate Ormond's existence? Pretty little nimble bewitching Kate? Why, there is not such a wonderful little woman in the county!"

Mr. Easton shook his head again, this time with a gesture of impatience. There was something in the man's false smile and absurd antics which provoked him.

"It is Kate who manages the farm, and makes the butter, and looks up the eggs, and feeds the poultry, and rears the calves. Dear me! what a Kate it is!" and the agent lifted up his hands in admiration—a gesture which nearly cost him an overthrow; for his horse, feeling the reins slackened, took the opportunity of shying viciously at a stone, and half capsize him.

Sir Frederick laughed good-naturedly. "I tell Sibley he's a single man, why doesn't he propose?"

"I daren't for my life, she's too good for me by half," said Sibley, shrugging his shoulders.

"At any rate, you have my message to convey to her. Perhaps, as the young gentleman is so fond of his siesta, he allows his sister to transact all the business," said Sir Frederick in a tone of raillery.

"And we will ride over the land and discuss what is to be done if Sibley fails in his diplomacy," continued the baronet, addressing Mr. Easton.

"With all my heart!"

Nothing delighted Mr. Easton more than the prospect of getting rid of the agent.

Besides, he wanted to ask Sir Frederick to lunch, and he would not force himself to extend the invitation to Mr. Sibley. Not on any account whatever!

He wished to introduce Sir Frederick to his daughter. He scarcely knew why he felt this sudden desire of extending the circle of her acquaintance.

The question seemed to haunt him with strange persistence.

Why should not Adela marry?

Sir Frederick had only been in the neighborhood a month. During that period he had seen and spoken to him several times on business; and Sir Frederick seemed rather to court his society.

The young man was quite unaccustomed to business. Some said he was a mere tool in the hands of Sibley. The place he had come to reside in was a grim old tower, which had been neglected for years and years. The Mortons rarely lived there, or indeed paid it a passing visit. They had a far better residence in the south of England—a splendid baronial hall, where they lived in magnificence, and held quite a court. But the young man had disliked the place since his father died, and had shut up the court, and beaten a retreat.

He wanted to retrench, he said, and look a little into his own affairs.

Perhaps he thought Mr. Easton might be useful to him.

"He did not care for gayety—he had had enough," he said, as, after a time, they rode slowly back to East Bramley. "All he wanted was a quiet domestic life, and leisure to improve his rather shattered resources. The estate had been drained almost to death. He wanted to nurse it back to life again."

He was very open and candid, and made no secret of his intentions.

He was going back to lunch with Mr. Easton. He had accepted the invitation immediately. In a few weeks an aunt was coming to live with him. Then he could return the hospitality, and he hoped they should be neighbors.

Lunch was set out on the dining-room table when they entered. The machinery of the household went by the clock; but Adela was not there. Indeed, Mr. Easton had to chafe impatiently some five minutes before she came in.

She wore a black silk dress, with an attempt at slight mourning. Her face was pale, and her eyes bore unmistakable marks of weeping.

"That," he thought—and again he could have ground his teeth as he thought it—"that was because of Margaret's child!"

Ah, well! He would put an end to that scheme, as soon as his guest was gone.

He wished Adela were not so cold and distant in her manner. He had never been struck with it before. As a hostess she was graceful and attentive, and let no one punctilio escape; but there seemed a wall of ice round her which kept off the least approach to sociability.

Was it his fault? He thought he would give her a hint at some convenient moment. He longed to whisper to her—"Bend, Adela; bend!"

But before that, came an affair of greater importance.

"Stay, Adela," said he, when the baronet had taken his departure, and Adela was about to leave the room; "I have a word to say to you."

She came back slowly, her eyes fixed on the ground.

"It is about this—this unlucky business," he said, a little embarrassed; for he was strictly a man of his word.

Adela raised her eyes. They had a troubled expression—a look of alarm.

"You took me by surprise, Adela; I had not time to fully discuss the point. I have made up my mind since that the step was unwise. I am not willing that you should adopt this child."

"It is too late," she said, hurriedly; "the child is here."

"What! so soon?" and his tone was angry and displeased. "You made haste, then, to take me at my word."

She did not speak. He walked up and down the room with a disturbed air. At length he came back to where she stood, her eyes cast down, her face pale and troubled.

"Where does this woman lodge?" he asked.

He would not let the word "Margaret" escape his lips.

She did not look up; she was downcast and dejected—more so than he had ever seen her. And she did not see the expression of his face. It was well she did not. He was grappling with a suggestion that he hated.

"Has she gone?" he asked presently, and with some anxiety, still grappling with the idea that he loathed—still forced right upon it.

There was a sound like that of a stifled sob.

"She is not likely to be gone, considering the state in which I left her."

And Adela turned hastily round and departed, scarce in time enough to hide a flood of tears.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TOO LATE.

He looked after her with some surprise. Adela did not often weep. Then he thought, come what might, he would have his way about this thing. Better weep now, than shed tears of regret ever after.

He did not order out his horse again, and yet he was going to East Bramley. He would slip down silently and unperceived; no one should be any the wiser. If he were compelled to see Margaret, he must. The interview should be brief as possible. He would offer her an allowance on condition that she took back her child and went—on condition that he neither saw nor heard of her again, or of it. But though he was fierce, and cruel, and unrelenting, there was a corner of his heart where some softness lingered.

He had a dream now and then, of a beautiful and prosperous woman, with children's faces round her. This was *his* Margaret. The other Margaret was a changeling, thrust into her place—a dwarfed, elfish thing, and who had disobeyed him, whom he refused to love. He loved the first Margaret, and secretly yearned after her.

Not that any one guessed it. The man was stern as could be; his face was set like a flint.

He walked down to East Bramley, taking the same route that she had done. His footprints might have touched hers. He had the address in his hand. Adela had laid it on the table, and he had taken it up. He knew the row of little houses near the station; but he did not know Mrs. Mason. The woman had lately come to the town. He did not flinch from his purpose when he came to the door; he was even more resolved than ever. What should he call her? He must give her the name he hated. He must ask for Mrs. Seymour.

The door was not opened all at once. He grew impatient, and knocked again. Then a woman opened it—a woman with a kind, motherly look, but very pale, and her eyes brimming over with tears. The sight irritated him. It was like these women, to go fretting after Margaret. A couple of simpletons! But he asked for her, and as he did so, he slipped into the passage. "The sooner this scene is over the better." He was getting harder rather than softer.

"She is gone, sir, poor thing," said the woman, putting her apron to her eyes, "and more's the pity for it. Do you belong to her, sir?"

"No!"

He said it fiercely, and he thought he spoke the truth. She had once belonged to him, but not now!

"I am sorry for that. If ever a poor thing wanted friends she did. You see, she wasn't fit to go; she had been up all night. I heard her up and down, and crying over the child. Ah, it was a sweet one!" and the woman paused at the recollection. "She could not bear to part with it, and no wonder," again the apron went to the eyes. "Ah, it ain't long for this world!"

"You think it will die?" said Mr. Easton, hastily.

"I think it may be too good to live, sir," replied the woman. "Its mother has done what she could, poor thing! She's torn herself away from it that it might have a home with the lady, and a chance for its life. Ah, no one knows what it cost her to do so!"

He was listening. He was vexed and disappointed beyond measure that she had escaped him; but he listened.

"She bore up wonderful. I shall not forget it soon, sir," and tears gushed to her eyes; "she had scarce had bit or sup since she came into the house. I made her a cup of tea, but there it stands untasted. I fetched her down here, thinking it would be more cheerful, and the room isn't let. See, poor dear, she has left her handkerchief."

His eyes glanced at the bit of cambric as she laid it on the table. It was wet with tears.

"I wasn't here when the parting took place; but I saw the lady go out with the child in her arms. The child looked frightened, and cried out, 'Mamma! mamma!' I thought she would hear it, and I went in as quick as quick; but,



bless you, she could hear nothing. She was stretched on the floor as if she was dead!"

He moved uneasily in his chair; not a single feeling, if he had one, struggled to the surface.

"Where is she gone to?" he asked, at length.

"Nonsense!" interrupted he, sternly. "What are you talking about?"

"I don't care, sir. I know trouble often drives folks desperate, and God, in mercy, takes away their senses. I had a sister once——"

"Nonsense, I tell you!" said he, more stern-



"SHE COULD NOT BEAR TO PART WITH IT, AND NO WONDER."

"Goodness knows, sir! She should not have gone if I could have helped it. When she was better, I made her sit on that sofa. She trembled all over like a child; and her face was so white, and her eyes so strange, it quite frightened me. Between ourselves, sir, if she's found at the bottom of the nearest pond——"

ly still, and rising as he said it. "So you can not give me any information?"

"I can't, sir. She slipped out of the house when my back was turned. My husband, he saw her go by the end of the street, as if she were distracted like. I told him he should have gone after her; but men don't take the heed of

things that women do; and he wanted his dinner. Anyhow, she's gone, sir—more's the pity for it!"

"She's gone!"

He repeated it as he walked down the street. It was too late, then—too late!

He could not help but wonder where she was gone to. He could not help but think of the untasted cup of tea, and the handkerchief wet with tears!

## CHAPTER XII.

### RUTH'S CHOICE OF FRIENDS.

HAVE you never basked in the glory of an early summer's morning, and noticed, all at once, a speck on the horizon? That speck, getting larger and larger still, proclaimed—no matter the sunshine, and the bees, and the flowers, no matter the brilliant beginning—"It will be rain to-day."

There had come a speck on Horace Vincent's horizon. It was not large at present, and he tried not to notice it. He never alluded to the blunder committed by his wife. It was brought home to him, nevertheless.

"Well, I am sure!" said Mrs. Jules, meeting him in the street shortly after. "You took us all by surprise, Mr. Vincent. Till I received your cards, I had not the least idea you were thinking about matrimony."

Horace said a few pacificatory words.

The lady, who boasted that she gave the *tone* to the East Bramley society, bridled and nodded, and was evidently very much offended.

"I have not had the pleasure of seeing the bride. You will bring her to call; I hope I shall not be *engaged*!"

Her manner of pronouncing the word, and the distant bow which took the place of the cordial shake of the hand, convinced Horace of the exact position in which he stood.

"I have lost Mrs. Jules forever!" said he, as he gazed somewhat mournfully after her. For with Mrs. Jules was the best connection in the county.

The rattle of a pair of ponies made him turn his head.

"There is another of my lost friends," thought he, as he caught sight of Miss Easton.

She stopped her ponies the minute she saw him.

"Mr. Vincent, allow me to congratulate you! I must own I was surprised, too; but you will care little about that," said she, laughing.

The tone of voice was so cordial and friendly, that the poor young man was quite touched. He began the same pacificatory speech he had attempted with Mrs. Jules, but Adela scarcely heard him out. Her clear dark eyes, which were looking straight into his, deciphered the cause of his embarrassment. She had a generous temper, and was above small affronts; and she felt very kindly towards the young bride.

"You must bring her to see me," said she; "I want to make her acquaintance."

Nothing she could have done was of more value to Horace than this little speech. He hurried home, quite in spirits.

"You must put on your best bib and tucker, my dear," said he, cheerfully; "I am going to take you a drive in the country to-morrow."

"Where are you going to? Oh, I shall like it so much!"

"To Bramley Hall, to call on the Eastons."

Her countenance fell immediately.

"Are we obliged to call there? Can't we go a drive without?"

"People in our circumstances must kill two birds with one stone, my dear," said he, laughing. She sat still a few minutes. The shade of self-will was creeping over her face.

"I don't want to call on the Eastons, Horace, I don't like them."

"Why not, Ruth?"

"For no specific reason. Only because I don't."

"But that is childish of you, Ruth."

She was silent; yet none the more was she convinced, as you could see by her face.

"They are old friends of mine," continued Horace. "I had introductions to them, and to Mrs. Jules; to no other people in the neighborhood."

"I dislike Mrs. Jules more than I do the Eastons."

He sighed. He could not help it. Nor could he argue the point any more. Dinner was brought in, such as it was; and he was obliged to eat it with such contentment as he possessed.

I say "such as it was" advisedly. Dinners were among the hints which were being given to him daily that he had made a mistake. He was no epicure. The simplest fare would have sufficed him, so that it was prepared with comfort and cleanliness. But his fare was not simple. Now and then it was beyond his means. But it was never presentable. Never even what Mrs. Perkins would have set before him. Nor was his home—disorderly, slovenly, and ill-managed—a great improvement on his lodgings.

He was being forced into this belief against his will.

When dinner was over he went away. He was resolved to carry his point; but he hated arguing. He would say nothing about it till the morning.

"Very well," said Ruth, when he told her what time the carriage would be at the door.

He was delighted. He hurried through his business, and got home just in time to see the carriage drive up. He had some little toilet to make, so he ran up stairs, expecting to find Ruth. But no Ruth was there. When he was ready, he looked about him for his wife.

"What in the world has become of her?" said he, ringing the bell in the little sitting-room below. "Where is your mistress?" asked he of the slatternly girl who presented herself.

"Oh, please sir, I quite forgot! The missis is gone."

"Gone! Where?"

"Please sir, I was to tell you, as she'd rather not, and she's gone a ride with Mrs. Mudford."

Horace stood immovable. A sterner look came into his face than had ever been seen there yet. He was very angry indeed.

What should he do? His first impulse was to dismiss the carriage, and abandon the Eastons altogether. But another idea suggested itself to his mind.

It was evident that he and his wife would go different ways.

If he went his way, need he go utterly alone? Could he afford to let all his old friends forsake him? Could he? The man was grieved to the very heart: he could have sat down and wept. He thought he would go. Come what might, his schemes should not be entirely frustrated! He stepped into the carriage, and ordered the man to drive to Bramley Hall.

Adela and her father were both at home, and received him with the utmost kindness. Adela had great tact. She passed over the fact of his wife's absence so lightly and gracefully, that nothing was made of it. She kept him to lunch; and when he was ready to depart, she said, "I was going to write a note; but we need not be so very formal. Could you and Mrs. Vincent dine with us on Thursday?"

He accepted the invitation joyfully. It was welcome as a shower in summer. He had his way to make, and could afford to lose no friends. And he was attached strongly to the Eastons. He had even once thought— But that was some time ago, and his thoughts had never come to any thing. Still, he was joyful. There was no vindictiveness whatever about Horace. All trace of resentment at his wife's conduct had disappeared. He thought she would be pleased and gratified. She should be dressed nicely in her dove-colored silk, and wear the chain he gave her, and the little bridal-wreath in her hair. She would look very lovely; he was sure of that. And when she had made the acquaintance of Adela, what an advantageous step that would be—all, in fact, that was wanting to his felicity.

Might he not, in the end, be able to pacify Mrs. Jules?

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### "BREAKERS AHEAD!"

RUTH had come from her drive, and was sitting reading over the fire. Her husband often found her thus engaged. She had subscribed to a circulating library close by, and spent a good deal of time with her feet on the fender, deep in the perusal of some sensational work.

Horace was sorry for it, but he held his peace.

She looked up when he came in, and laid her book on her lap. She was smiling and serene as ever. It was one of her characteristics.

"Ruth!" (he kissed her, to show that he bore no malice), "Ruth, I have an invitation for you."

"Have you? Where is it to?"

"The Eastons have very kindly asked us to dinner on Thursday."

Again that fall of the countenance. But it cleared up in a moment.

"Then we can't go. We are promised to the Mudfords."

She said it in a triumphant tone, which provoked him immensely.

"The Mudfords, Ruth? You know I don't visit there."

"Oh, but I am going, and so of course you will."

"Of course I shall not. The Eastons are going to have a dinner-party."

"And so are the Mudfords. They have got it up expressly on our account."

"Ruth, I have accepted this invitation, and I will not be gainsaid."

She was silent. There was a wonderful amount of obstinacy in her silence.

"Why will you persist in insulting the Eastons?" he asked.

"I don't insult them. I don't want to have any thing to do with them."

"But they are my friends."

"I can't help that. It does not follow that they should be mine."

He gave an impatient sigh. He was weary of this unmeaning opposition. He tried to reason with her. He told her of his precarious footing in the town, and how he wished to avoid giving offense to those who had treated him with kindness. He begged her, for his sake, to give way. Simply, if for no other reason, for love of him.

She listened, her face serene, smiling, and obstinate.

When he had done, she said, quietly, that he might do as he liked, she meant to go to the Mudfords. After that he felt it useless to argue. He went to his office, which was now becoming a kind of refuge. On the way, he looked into Mrs. Perkins's window, and sighed.

But he had one last hope. She might think better of it when she was alone. He persuaded himself that she would. When he came home for tea, he took out his desk, and drew a sheet of note-paper from it, and fetched the ink. She was so sweet and smiling, that he felt sure she would deny him nothing. No little fracas, none of the untoward circumstances of life, ever seemed to ruffle her.

"Now, Ruth, you must answer Miss Easton's invitation. I told her you would when I had spoken to you. It seemed only right to let the little wife have a voice in the matter. I accepted, but it was conditionally."

"I have told you I do not mean to go," said she, settling herself in her usual place, her feet on the fender.

"I hoped you would think better of it."

"I have not thought about it at all."

He had a great mind to insist—perhaps he had better have done so—but he was a man of peace; and he had a tender, sensitive nature. He was more fitted to lead than to drive.

"Of course, if you will not go, I can not."

"You had better go. You will not like to be left at home. I shall be at the Mudfords'."

He wished the Mudfords were at Jericho.

Very bitter were his feelings as she wrote to decline. But what could he do? "If I go alone, it will be worse," thought he. When she had written the note he went out, and walked up and down in the cool night air. He hardly cared, for the moment, what became of him! He did not oppose her going to the Mudfords, as he might have done. He had a vague dread of measuring strength with her. He had never had to do with a thoroughly obstinate nature. And he felt, if the foundation, slight as it was, were rent away, the whole fabric might go to ruins. He bore his grief manfully and in silence. She had no grief to bear. She was smiling and serene, and read her novels, and trifled over her wax flowers, and ran in and out of Mrs. Mudford's house at will. Truly she needed a stronger hand than his to control her.

Thursday came. He knew she meant to go, for she began to dress by dinner-time, and was closeted up half the day. When he came in to tea a cab was at the door, and she had just sailed down, in her magnificence. He had never seen the dress she had on before: it was a new one, and far grander, he thought, than was necessary.

"So you are going?" he said, gravely and sadly.

"Yes. How do you like my new dress?"

"How came you to buy it without consulting me?"

"Oh, that dove-colored silk is such a dowdy, and the Mudfords have seen it. I wanted something quite new. It is a bride's party, remember."

"Have you paid for the dress, Ruth?"

"Oh dear no!" and she laughed. "I put it down in the account at Bassett's."

He let her pass. So she ran up bills, then. He must see into that to-morrow; and he sat down in the chair by the fire, his face buried in his hands, and his heart sadder perhaps than it had ever been.

She had not come home till three in the morning, and he was sitting there then.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MR. SIBLEY'S WAY OF DOING THINGS.

"Good gracious me, sir! how you frightened me, a-coming and looking in for all the world like a ghost!" And Peggy dropped the pound of butter she was patting and coaxing into its right shape—and doing it deftly, too, with the air of one who knows thoroughly what she is about—on the kitchen floor.

The man who had looked into the kitchen window was Mr. Sibley. Mr. Sibley had certain ways and customs of his own. He was come on rather an important errand to Ormond Cottage; but he did not ride straight to the point. Oh dear no, that was not at all his custom. He never had done such a thing in his life.

There was a kind of out-house and an old hovel just as you came over the border-line where the meadow-farm began. It stood in the corner of a field. Mr. Sibley dismounted, went into the hovel, tied his horse to a rather tumble-down rack, where the wagoner fastened his horses now and then, and left him. After this, he proceeded on foot. He had the air of one thoroughly accustomed to reconnoitre; he peeped and pried about in every nook and corner. He had a little memorandum-book in his hand, and wrote down observations. He was of an observing nature. If you glance at his physiognomy you will see what large perceptive faculties Nature has given him; she does not appear to have given him much moral—at least, nothing to speak of. He moves about in a sly, cautious manner; but he lets nothing escape him. He sees the gaps in the fence, and writes them down. There are not many, and if old Jacobs were not getting worn-out there would have been none. He sees, too, the gates; well, they want a little doing to; gates will get out of order, especially when the wagon-load of clover, which was only brought in last month, ran against one of them and knocked it off the hinges. But he writes down, first, "Fences out of repair; ditto, gates."

"Land in pretty good condition," but—no! Look at the thistles in that field. And here, where he stands—oh dear! there is positively moss! Come, there is no withstanding personal evidence. And he makes haste to write, in a good, firm hand, "Land wants cleaning very badly indeed."

That last paragraph has done him good. He walks on briskly, and with the air of a man who is doing a rattling business. Presently he comes to the farm-yard.

He peeps and pries into the cow-sheds. Nice fat heifers are being made comfortable for the butcher. There is plenty of stock in that field. Yes, and that too—sheep, and cows, and horses.

Plenty of stock, if it is in good condition.

He will just see to that, and he climbs nimbly over a stile. How very lean those Herefords look—almost like Pharaoh's lean kine. He is not aware, and he would not care to know either, that the Herefords came in last week to be fattened. It is quite enough for him that he fancies he can count their ribs. He is obliged to qualify a little, because of the sleek heifers yonder; but he writes down, "Stock middling."

Then he gets briskly over the stile, and proceeds on his way.

Here is a famous windfall for him, better than he expected.

There was a gale last Saturday, and it unroofed some of the outbuildings. How wild and disorderly the pieces of thatch look scattered about. This is Tuesday, and the men are coming to-morrow to repair the mischief.

What does it matter to him when the mischief was done, or when it will be mended?

He writes down, glibly, "Buildings much neglected; in a shameful condition!"

Here is the house. Well, the kitchen-garden is not bad. Might be made more of. Plenty of weeds. Hem! these fruit-trees want grafting sadly. Evidently, the gardener does not know how to manage them. There is too much wood, and too much root. What a shame to let that vine use up all the wall. And a greenhouse, too—very silly, indeed. What does a farmer want with a greenhouse?

And having taken a little more time for observations, he wrote down, "Traces of mismanagement everywhere."

Pray where is the house-dog? Why does he not bark Mr. Sibley off the premises?

But Mr. Sibley had finished his observations, and put the book in his pocket. He would not have been without that book for any money under the sun.

Then, stealthily pursuing his way, he proceeded to startle Peggy out of her senses.

"Is your master at home?" asked he, softly, and in his usual insinuating voice.

"Yes; but you needn't have gone and frightened a body so," replied Peggy, picking up her pound of butter from the floor, and surveying it with anxiety. "Gentlefolks always goes to the front-door."

"Ah! but you see I happened to be on this side the house. And besides, I'm not a proud man—I'm very humble."

"Eh!" said Peggy, looking up at him.

"There's a shilling for you, my good woman, to pay for your fright. Now just tell me if your master is at home."

"Thank ye."

And Peggy pocketed the shilling with great celerity.

"Will you walk round to the other door, sir? I'll run and open it."

"Oh no, thank you! I won't give you the trouble. I'll walk through this way." Kitchen clean and creditable. Famous hams and bacon.

Peggy led him through the hall into a pleasant room of a comfortable home-like appearance, and where a bright fire was burning. This was the general sitting-room. He was very glad of that. He wanted to see things as they were in common every-day life, not as they appeared in a stiff, formal drawing-room; and he could peep about to his heart's content.

There was Miss Ormond's desk. She had been writing a letter.

"My dear James."

"Who can that be, I wonder? James? A man's name. Has she a cousin of the name of James? How much has she written? Only

a line, which says that she received his letter yesterday. Here is another letter;" and he clutches it. "How provoking! It is not directed, and yet fastened down. How neat she keeps her desk! What a tempting stick of sealing-wax! He had a great mind to pocket it. And that is her work-box; how very orderly—with its reels of white cotton, and its scissors, and needles, and tapes, and buttons! She is making a shirt, then. Is it her brother's, I wonder? Stay, here is a paper pinned to the heavy cushion: 'One of Joe's shirts—a pattern!' Who on earth is Joe?"

## CHAPTER XV.

KATE ORMOND.

WHEN Peggy had shut up Mr. Sibley in the general sitting-room, she went up a curious, crooked-back staircase to an apple-chamber over the kitchen.

A very small young lady, in a print dress natively made, and as clean as a new pin, was busily engaged in rubbing and sorting apples.

"If you please, Miss Kate, here's Mr. Sibley, a-wanting to see master."

"How tiresome!" and the young lady turned round in a short, rather snappish, way. "I never set myself to do any thing, but I am interrupted directly!" And, with an impatient jerk, she pulled off a pair of old gloves which kept her pretty white hands from getting soiled.

"Shall I tell the master?" asked Peggy, stolidly.

"No; that's of no use. Of course, I must go myself."

"Master's in the study, Miss."

"I know it," said Kate, crossly. "I wanted him to help me do these apples, and he wouldn't."

Peggy stood a minute, still stolid.

"You can go, Peggy; I'll come;" and she threw down the duster with which she had been rubbing the bright, cherry-cheeked apples.

"Of course, I shall have to come."

Peggy retired, and a few minutes after, Kate glided into the study with a little rush, like that of a miniature whirlwind.

"Now, Luke, get up directly! Mr. Sibley is here."

These words were addressed to a very large, long individual, who lay on the sofa, perfectly at his ease, and with a cigar in his mouth.

The individual never stirred an inch.

"Do you hear, Luke? Mr. Sibley is come," repeated she, the words coming out as sharp as could be through her eager lips.

"I don't want to see Mr. Sibley."

"Who is to see him, then?"

"You can, if you like; if you are so fond of him."

"Luke, for shame! it's abominable of you! When I've been slaving all the morning over the apples."



"We were not talking of the apples"—and he gave a little turn to make himself more thoroughly comfortable—"we were talking about Mr. Sibley."

"And you never will help me do any thing," continued she, coming nearer, and clenching

miration; "if you did not use it up somehow I don't know what would become of us."

She gave a short little laugh; she knew in her heart that he spoke the truth.

"But, Luke, now," said she, caressingly, and going close up to him, "come, do get up! How



"IS YOUR MASTER AT HOME?"

her little hand; "you'd lie there hour after hour!"

"I'm tired—my back aches."

"And how do you think I am? How do you think my back is?"

"You have so much superfluous energy, Kate," and he looked at her with a kind of ad-

can I manage the business matters as well as every thing else?"

"If I get up I shall kick him out of the house."

"Luke!"

"I shall! Kick him clean out, as if he were a football."

A frightened look came into her face; she moved to the glass which hung over the mantel-piece.

"I'm not fit to be seen," she said, with a kind of whimper; "just look at my hair."

"Now, Kate, don't tell fibs!"

Her hair was chestnut, and waved in a way that was thoroughly after its own fashion. She wore it in short little ringlets all over her head; very pretty ringlets they were, too.

"I suppose I must go; it's really a great shame. I have to do every thing," continued she, still whimpering.

"Off with you!" said Luke from the sofa.

"What am I to say?" asked she, suddenly facing round to her brother.

"Oh, you know what to say. You know as much of the matter as I do, and can put it a great deal better."

She was smoothing out a jaunty little bow of ribbon that fastened her collar. It did not want it the least bit in the world.

"If you are not off soon, Kate, I'll go!" said Luke from the sofa, and in a deep, gruff, threatening voice.

"Oh, no, no! Lie you still," cried Kate, alarmed beyond measure. And she was gone in an instant.

This little dialogue had taken time, and Mr. Sibley had quite finished his inspection. He was sitting in a chair as still as a mouse. The moment Kate entered he rose, and stood bowing with the utmost obsequiousness.

"Good-morning, sir," said Kate. Kate was short and sharp, not often sweet.

"My dear Miss Ormond, this is a pleasure I did not expect. I called to speak to your brother."

"My brother wishes you to say what you have to say to me," replied Kate.

"I can't help it," she had said many times to herself, "and I won't tell a lie. If Luke chooses to do in this way, he must take the consequences."

Mr. Sibley looked puzzled, but he was as soft as silk; his paws were like velvet.

"I'm sure it is a great pleasure," replied he, softly rubbing his hands, "to talk to so agreeable a young lady as Miss Ormond. But, you see, my visit was on business, and young ladies can't be expected to understand—"

"I do," interrupted Kate, boldly; "at least, I understand the business you have come about."

"Dear me! how acute you are! Dear me! really!" And he rubbed his hands together, still softly, but in admiration.

"Is it about the farm?" asked Kate, still boldly.

"Yes, it is about the farm."

"Well, you may just say it all to me. I know every thing."

"I don't doubt it; indeed, I might have known; but really— So I suppose your brother declines to speak to me?"

Kate was silent.

He might think what he liked; it was Luke's

fault. He was not engaged in any thing but smoking, and she would not say he was.

"It is rather—rather—just a little bit rude of him," said Mr. Sibley.

Kate was still silent.

"So I suppose you and I are to settle the business between us," resumed Mr. Sibley, after thoughtfully stroking his chin. "Well, it is a simple matter enough—as clear as daylight."

"I am glad of it," said Kate. "I like things that are as clear as daylight."

Her keen eyes were aimed at him, as she spoke, with such sharpness and penetration, that he lowered his before them.

"The fact is, that my generous and respected patron, Sir Frederick Morton, has sent me to offer terms for the purchase of the farm."

"Yes."

"And he offers a good round sum—more than it's worth, a great deal—oh, a very great deal!"

"Indeed!"

"He offers eleven thousand pounds."

"Does he?" said Kate, carelessly.

"Yes. He wants to have it, in fact, at any price."

"I am sorry for that," returned Kate, "because we do not mean to sell it."

"Oh, but you will think better of that!"

Kate shook her head.

"I tell you you will, Miss Ormond, when you come to reflect—"

"It is no matter of reflection. My dear father, on his death-bed, made us promise never to let it go, and we never will."

She spoke in a sharp, resolute tone. There was a vast amount of decision of character about her, small person as she was.

He looked at her a few minutes, at the sharp outline of her face—pretty, too, and piquant, but sharp, decidedly; at the keen eyes, which glittered with a sort of defiance; at the firm, compact little figure; the neat, trim dress, without a pin awry. He took note of every thing. And he hated her. He hated the whole race of Ormonds. Had not the old man, now in his grave, once told him he was a sneaking coward? The Ormonds had the way of speaking their minds pretty freely; and Mr. Sibley had a retentive memory, assisted by his memoranda. He was never likely to forget that remark.

What should he do? He could not exactly bully and threaten a lady in her own house; out of it, was another matter; and out of reach of the long strong brother on the sofa.

"You see, my dear Miss Ormond," he began, things going exactly in the groove he wished, "it may not be altogether in your power to refuse."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, pardon the observation, that the tenure by which you hold this property may not be so secure as you suppose."

"I am at a loss to understand you, sir."

"It is a complicated affair, and, as I said before, young ladies—"

"Oh, have no scruple, I beg, sir. I can see into the matter as clearly as any body, though I have the misfortune to be a young lady."

He bowed submissively. "You understand the meaning of the word 'debt'?"

"If I know my alphabet, I should think I do," said Kate, scornfully.

"Well, then, your father has died, leaving a rather heavy debt unpaid."

Kate started.

"Sir Frederick holds the memorandum in his hand—in fact it is a letter with your father's signature. I need not tell a young lady of your comprehensive intellect that he can enforce the payment."

She was looking steadily at him.

"Unless," added he, dropping his eyes under the sharp fire of hers, "unless you are disposed to come to terms, and comply with Sir Frederick's wishes. He offers to take the farm in lieu of the debt. In that case, you will be the gainers by the bargain to the tune of some few thousands; no bad thing either."

"Sir," said Kate, quietly, and without the least bluster, "I believe you have told me a very great falsehood."

"What!" and the man's face grew white and livid with suppressed passion—"what! do you charge me with falsehood—me—me?"

"Either with falsehood, or with a mistake of your own invention, sir; which you choose."

"I was never so insulted before, except once"—and he glared at her, now completely unmasked—"except once, and that was by an Ormond!"

"We are a very plain-spoken race," said Kate, coolly, and standing her ground, "and have a tolerable share of penetration. It would not be very easy to impose on us."

"We shall see—we shall see!" and he took up his hat. "The subject won't be let drop, or my name is not Sibley."

"Good-morning, Mr. Sibley," said Kate, with provoking nonchalance. He glared at her again, and went out of the house. Before he was out of sight of it, he turned back and shook his fist.

"Twice insulted—twice," he muttered; "once by him, once by her! But I'll be revenged, and that speedily. See if I don't!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FALSE.

It was just a week since Sir Frederick Morton's aunt had come to take up her abode at the Tower. She considered this an act of condescension on her part. Indeed, if her jointure had not been very small, and the step rather convenient as regarded her finances, I doubt if she would have consented to it. But her husband had left her scarce standing-room, in the gay circle in which she loved to flutter, and she had been glad to retire with dignity.

Lady Peters was a thoroughly made-up per-

son. Few women more so, even in this superficial age. She looked about thirty, but her nearest friends knew that there never was a greater mistake than to suppose so. She was not handsome, but what nature had failed to do art attempted to achieve. There was a vast amount of style about her. Her hair, abundant enough after the modern idea of abundance, was dressed in the height of the fashion. Her complexion was got up to perfection. Her pearly rows of teeth were white and even. Her figure was youthful. Her dress was in the best possible taste. She could talk on almost any subject. She was "up" in the most refined usages of society; to use a homely and familiar expression, she was a host in herself.

"What a goose the girl is!" said her ladyship, as she reclined in an easy-chair by the fire, opposite her nephew.

She had just finished breakfast. He had been out some hours with his agent, and was ready for his lunch.

"I don't think so, aunt. I think it was the right thing to do."

"Nonsense about right!" said his aunt, sharply. "You have such absurd notions, Frederick. The right thing is what will forward our own interests the most."

She never cared to keep the mask on before her nephew.

He buried his face in the paper he was reading, instead of making any reply.

"Only that of course she will turn the child off, if the arrangement becomes inconvenient," continued her ladyship.

"The child has nowhere else to go, aunt."

"There is the work-house."

"Really, aunt—"

"My dear, I know more of the world than you do. I know all that sort of thing is sheer nonsense. The only real thing is self-interest."

He did not agree with her in the least. He knew better in his heart; but he lacked moral courage to say so.

"And are these very extraordinary people the only neighbors you have?" asked her ladyship after a pause.

"Almost the only neighbors."

"Dear me! and what was he—the man, I mean?" She was speaking of Mr. Easton.

"He was in some business, I believe. I think he had a mill."

"Good gracious! you have not brought me here to associate with a miller?"

"He is a capital sort of man, aunt," said Sir Frederick, biting his lip. "His honesty, and common sense, and knowledge of—"

"Don't tell me of honesty and common sense," said she, sharply. "And my dear little Parisian bonnet, and the get-up I have prepared with such care! Ah, well—I am not quite come to that yet. I shall pack up my things—"

"He is one of our richest men, too—almost a millionaire," continued Sir Frederick carelessly, and as if it were an after-thought.



"A millionaire! Why on earth did you not tell me that at first, instead of talking about his honesty? You are the most obtuse young man of my acquaintance, Frederick. Of course, that quite alters the case, quite!"

"It would not weigh with me an atom, if the man were not a good man," said Sir Frederick firmly.

"Ah! that's just like you," and she held up her hands. "You always were so different to the rest of us. How you contrived to get those notions is perfectly mysterious."

"I could easily tell you, aunt."

"Could you? I should really like to know, out of curiosity."

"From the Bible;" and the young man spoke solemnly, and with feeling. Yet he was almost, not quite, persuaded to be a Christian. His character lacked one element—decision.

She did not speak for a moment or two. Something restrained her. Then she said, as if to change the subject—

"I think you told me they talked of calling?"

"They did, and I fancy here they are. Yes, the carriage is at the door," said Sir Frederick, rising and looking out.

"Dear me! what Vandalism! at this hour, too, when one might be in bed."

"You forget Mr. Easton is a millionaire."

"No I don't. I think—well, it is very shocking, and I a Morton, and a Peters, and with the best blood in the kingdom running in my veins. But I think I had better tolerate them."

"I think you had, aunt."

He spoke dryly, and opened the door for her to pass. Just for one moment there came a very unpleasant look into her face; a look so unwomanly, so unamiable, so thoroughly unchristian, that we are glad to turn away from it. It was gone directly. She entered the drawing-room beaming with smiles. It was part of her tactics to adapt herself to her society.

"Adaptation is just every thing," she would say to her nephew, "the mainspring of popularity." It was her policy, now, to be as neighborly as possible.

"I am so glad! it is so kind of you," she said, advancing to her visitors with the utmost cordiality. "This is really what I call neighborly!"

"We have taken the earliest opportunity of paying our respects to your ladyship," replied Mr. Easton, with his usual stiff courtesy. "I hope you are pleased with the neighborhood."

"Oh, I am charmed with it! It is so peaceful and retired about here. I love retirement," said she, with enthusiasm, and yet giving a quick glance towards where Adela sat, entertained by Sir Frederick. "Come, my dear Frederick, I want to talk to Miss Easton. I have so long desired to make her acquaintance;" and very gracefully, and, as it seemed, with perfect innocence, she dislodged him.

Sir Frederick walked over to Mr. Easton.

"And how goes on the Ormond business?" asked Mr. Easton.

"Well, not so very satisfactorily;" and he drew Sir Frederick into the bay-window. "Sibley says the place is very much neglected."

"Does he?"

There was distrust in the tone, and distrust in the heart.

"But it is no business of mine," thought Mr. Easton.

"Sibley took the trouble to look about him, and see how things were going on. Sibley is a first-rate fellow, you know, though he makes mistakes sometimes. The best of us may do that."

Mr. Easton was silent. Then, as Sir Frederick seemed to wait for an answer, he said a few chilling words about knowing very little of his neighbors.

"But when you do know, you will be convinced of it," ventured Sir Frederick, in a tone of heartiness which contrasted with the other's coldness. "Sibley tells me he was very much insulted."

"Who insulted him?"

"Both of them did. The young man refused to see him, though he was in the house. This is not the first time either, Sibley says. And as for the young lady—"

"Well?" asked Mr. Easton.

"She pitched into him quite rudely and coarsely. I had to worm it out of him. Of course, a young lady never does wrong," he said, politely. "Sibley is so very courteous himself—thoroughly the gentleman!"

Mr. Easton smiled. "What terms did he make? This is of the most consequence," said he.

"No terms at all. Would you believe it? They deny the existence of a debt I had against their father."

"Do they?"

"Yes; and refuse a really fair offer I made them for the estate. They would have had a good sum left after paying this debt. I shall not make the offer again. I will not expose Sibley—"

"Excuse me. What a famous view you have from this window!" interrupted Mr. Easton, with the air of a man who is being pressed too far. "I call it quite a grand landscape." And having given the conversation this little turn, he contrived to keep it in a different groove. "I know Sibley is a rascal, and perhaps I ought to say so," thought he; "but I hate being mixed up with other people's affairs. And what do I know of the Ormonds?"

"Of course," Lady Peters was saying to Adela, at the other end of the room—"of course, I have heard of your act of generosity. How very good of you! It is just what I should have done myself."

"Should you?"

Adela's keen, sensible eye rather disconcerted her.

"I am so fond of children. I dote on them. Pray, is it a boy or a girl?"

"A girl."

"How old?"

"She is nearly two years old."

"Charming age!—so innocent!—so truly fascinating! I lost a dear child just at that age;" and the white handkerchief was raised to her eyes. "It was such a trial!"

"It must have been," said Adela, quietly.

"Yes. I have only one child left—a son. I call him my child, but he is five-and-twenty. Poor fellow!" and she sighed.

Adela wondered what for.

"He is so sensitive, my boy is—too much so almost to live. That is why I call him 'poor fellow.'"

Adela listened. The word "sensitive" struck her ear.

"The truth is, he does not mix much with the world. He has always given himself up to literary pursuits. He is a musician and an artist. His pictures are beautiful!"

"An artist!" said Adela, with interest.

"Yes. He is coming here to sketch, soon.

I want him to make some sketches about Bramley Hall, if your father would permit."

"Oh, we should be very pleased!" And then she stopped. She had spoken with unusual warmth, and she checked herself. She was thinking of Margaret's husband.

"Charming people, Adela!" said her father, as they rode home. "What a very fine woman Lady Peters is, to be sure! She might be his sister. How do you like her?"

"I can hardly give an opinion yet," replied Adela. In her heart she did not like her. Something whispered, "False!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### MR. SIBLEY TAKES A HOLIDAY.

"It is so seldom you go out, Sibley, no one can accuse you of neglecting my affairs," said Sir Frederick, with a good-tempered smile.

"I should not go now, Sir Frederick, for the mere sake of a holiday. People in these days," added Mr. Sibley, "think far too much, in my opinion, of holidays. Bless me! what scrambling about there is all over the country!"

"Ah, well, a holiday is a jolly good thing, Sibley. I am not far enough off my school-boy days to lose all apprehension of that."

"The fact is, Sir Frederick, I have a relative who is ill, and rather wishes to see me. So I think it is my duty to go."

"You are a famous stickler for duty, aren't you, Sibley?"

"Well, Sir Frederick, in my humble way I am," replied Mr. Sibley, modestly.

"Go, then, by all means, and I hope you will find your relative better," said the young baronet, kindly.

"Thank you, Sir Frederick; and now do you know, a little business matter may be made to blend harmoniously with this journey? I mean

as regards that troublesome affair of the Ormonds."

"Troublesome enough, Sibley. If they had not insulted you, and if—"

"Oh, never mind me, Sir Frederick—never mind me! I can forgive and forget as soon as any one. But it is your honor which is at stake."

"How do you make that out?"

"People might say you were afraid."

"It is not very likely to be said of a Morton," returned Sir Frederick, with a touch of haughtiness.

"I know you come of a brave race, my dear patron—very brave indeed, and if that great hulking giant, Luke Ormond, did boast that you might come and claim the money, if you dared—"

"He never said that, Sibley!" cried the baronet, flushing angrily, and his pride touched.

Mr. Sibley shrugged his shoulders. "They say he did. It's the popular report in the neighborhood."

"How very impertinent of people to bandy my name about," said the baronet, annoyed.

"You see, the Ormonds themselves will drive me to extremities. Besides, I wonder at their want of delicacy in a matter that concerned their late father, as well as themselves."

"It is very foolish of them. They had much better have accepted your offer."

"I shan't make it again, Sibley."

"Nothing ought to induce you. You must take proceedings against them."

"But you forget that my claim would scarcely stand in law. A letter is the only evidence I have. In that letter the elder Ormond clearly recognizes the obligation."

"But can you get no witnesses as to the existence of the debt?"

"Not a ghost of one, Sibley. It was a purely private and personal arrangement, in which lawyers were not allowed to interfere."

"Ah, a great pity," sighed Sibley. "Lawyers are absolutely indispensable in such cases. Sheer madness to act without them! Now in my small affairs, trifling as they are when compared with yours, I never take a single step involving property or interest of any kind excepting through a solicitor. And what is the result? I have never lost a penny yet! Take my humble advice, Sir Frederick, and—"

"True, true," interrupted the baronet; "but what we have now to do is this—how can we induce the Ormonds to part with the estate?"

"How can we? Oh, I think I can manage it, Sir Frederick, if you will intrust the business to me."

"But I should like to know beforehand what course you will take with them?"

"Why, just this. I fancy if you can not find a witness that the debt is unpaid, I can."

"It is quite impossible!" exclaimed Sir Frederick, laughing; "your zeal carries you beyond all bounds. You might as well try to remove a mountain."

"But I really do happen to know a person who was intimately connected with the Ormonds, and who was acquainted with their affairs better, perhaps, than they were themselves. He would be very likely to remember the transaction in question, and might be able to throw some light upon it."

"Shall you see this person when you are from home?"

"I intend to do so. This is, in fact, the gist of my journey."

Sir Frederick reflected a moment.

"I am sorry," said he, good-naturedly, "very sorry for those poor young people. After all, they are to be excused for refusing to receive so unsupported a proof. And the affair may ruin them."

"Very likely will," said Mr. Sibley, coolly.

"Suppose I were to see Mr. Ormond myself, and try to talk the matter over."

"It would never do, Sir Frederick, never do at all," exclaimed the agent, in alarm. "He is not a fit opponent. He is for mere brute force. Persuasion would go no way with him."

"You think not?"

"I am sure not. No, you had better leave it to me."

"I say, Sibley," added Sir Frederick, as the agent turned to leave the room, "I am not a hard man. I don't mind if they like to pay down—"

"But they won't," and the agent came back. "They won't; firmness is the ruling passion of their race—obstinacy I should call it."

The young baronet walked to the window, and looked out as if lost in thought.

Sibley wanted to push the matter to extremes. Sibley, no doubt, was right. Sibley knew better than he did. Perhaps it was weakness, this kindly feeling to the Ormonds. If the Ormonds tried to impose on him, if they were insolent and unscrupulous, it would never do to succumb. Yet he did so wish to live at peace with his neighbors. He felt so tenderly towards the orphan and the fatherless. What should he do?

Alas! for that one keystone in a man's character, *decision*.

Sibley had it. While the master wavered and deliberated, and drifted to and fro, the man was gone.

He could ride his hunter when he liked; he had a nice little balance at his banker's, and, on the whole, things were going very smoothly with him. But he was not a happy man, nor was he likely to be while Mordecai sat at the gate.

He was foolish enough to let this circumstance be the fly in the ointment.

He walked home briskly. He meant to be off by the next train. The man understood his master to the letter. He knew the generosity of that warm, noble heart. He knew the feebleness of the irresolute will. And he would not give time for the one to overcome the other. He would strike while the iron was hot.

"Is my daughter up yet?" he asked, with a rather different tone of voice from the one he had been using lately.

"Yes, sir, she is in the drawing-room waiting for dinner."

The drawing-room was very handsomely furnished, and as large and commodious as that at the Tower.

Sibley liked luxury. He was by nature of a soft, effeminate habit, and he had crept on from one luxury to another.

He was a widower. His wife had died years ago, when Maude Sibley was an infant.

It was rather a painful heritage which the mother had bequeathed to the child, incessant ill-health.

None knew what Maude suffered. She might be said never to have been young. All her childhood, and her early youth, were spent in battling with some disease which medical skill could not lay hold upon. It was like a blight, which made her life apparently dreary and joyless—that is, as far as externals went.

She was young still, but there was no beauty in the palid, sickly face, and the dwarfed, stunted figure—if, indeed, we except the look of patient resignation which shone from her eyes, the quietude of her spirit, the piety and trustfulness of her nature. These were hidden ornaments, pearls of great price.

Her father did not see them. He never had. It was one of his sorest trials that the girl should have grown up so different to other girls.

He wanted her to be handsome and brilliant and accomplished. He wanted to push her forward into society, so as to gain a more advanced footing for himself.

He would not have cared what he spent on her dress, or how worldly and frivolous she might be. Instead of which she would sing hymns—he had heard the servants say so. And he knew the book which was her constant companion in her hours of solitude—her *Bible*. He could not make her the partner of his schemes either, and Sibley was always scheming. There was some influence which unconsciously restrained him. So that the father and the daughter held on each a separate course; like parallel lines, they never met.

Yet she struggled hard to be some kind of a companion to him; she would be at the head of the table, if possible. Many times it was not

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MAUDE SIBLEY.

MR. SIBLEY had once lived in lodgings, and had days of adversity. Fortune had been at odds with him; but that was some time ago. He had feathered his nest well by now. He had a comfortable house and a comfortable income. The income, people hinted, was made rather than earned. But people are apt to be ill-natured when a neighbor climbs up the ladder while they remain at the bottom. Sibley was pretty nearly up the ladder in these days.

possible, and she would lie stretched on her bed of suffering, where he never visited her, or attempted to soothe or comfort her.

"It is not in my way, and Maude is used to it," he would mutter to himself.

She was sitting by the fire reading when he came in from his interview with Sir Frederick. She put aside her book directly.

"You are late, dear papa."

She had a cheerful, pleasant voice, and she never alluded to her affliction, except on very rare occasions.

"I am late; and now I don't think I can stay to dine; I want to catch the train."

"Oh, you must have your dinner first. Let us go down stairs, I dare say it is waiting."

"It is as likely as not we shall have to wait for it. There was not a sign of breakfast when I came down this morning."

"How was that?" asked Maude, in a tone of annoyance.

"Indeed, how can I tell?" and he shrugged his shoulders. "When there is no mistress, or as good as none, of course the servants have it all their own way."

A faint flush rose to her pale, sickly cheeks.

"I will make inquiries," she said, gently.

Maude had always ready the soft answer which turneth away wrath.

"Ah, I don't know what good will come of that. Of course, when you are always in bed of a morning the servants take a license. They are sure to do so."

She did not speak, but the tears sprang to her eyes.

"There! there! you need not begin to whimper; I can never say a word! I suppose being an invalid makes you so peevish."

She peevish!—Maude Sibley peevish! A more gentle and forbearing creature never lived.

She wiped away the tears hurriedly.

"You need not ring the bell, I am not going down to dinner," he said. "There won't be time; I shall get a snatch of something on the road, and I lunched at the Tower."

"When shall you be home, papa?"

"I can't tell; in a day or two, I suppose."

He had buttoned up his coat, and taken his hat from the table.

Maude had stood looking at him. There was an evident struggle going on in her mind. At length she advanced a step.

"Papa," said she, softly.

"Yes, child."

She laid her hand on his arm, and her tearful eyes were raised to him.

"Dear papa, kiss me before you go."

He gave her a cold, hasty kiss.

"Papa," said she, still detaining him, and speaking as though the words were forced from her, "I should not have asked, but for one thing. I feel my life hangs on a thread, the doctors tell me it does. I get weaker and weaker every day. I might die, papa, without having the opportunity of seeing you, or bidding you farewell."

He looked at her with more feeling than he

had shown yet. He saw how ill she was—how fast fading; and perhaps some touch of remorse strove within him.

"I dare say I shall be home to-morrow night," he said; "and now have your dinner, and amuse yourself with some nice book. You have one there, I see. What is it?"

He took it up carelessly. Perhaps he was glad to change the topic. He turned to the blank leaf at the beginning, and read aloud the name of the owner.

He read in a loud, angry voice, his face coloring with surprise, "Kate Ormond!"

"What business has this book here, Maude?" he asked, in displeasure.

"Kate lent it me, papa, a long time ago. We were school-fellows, if you remember."

"Then I won't have it—I won't have the name of Ormond turning up under one's very eyes. I shall throw the book in the fire." And, with a passionate gesture, he flung it into the midst of the blaze. "I will teach you how to borrow books of one's worst enemy!" he cried, turning fiercely upon her, every trace of tenderness gone.

She did not speak. She was very pale, and she stood with her hands tightly clasped together. He went away directly, and she heard him ride off on horseback, and the gates swing back after him.

A minute after a servant entered. "Dinner is quite ready, Miss Sibley; will you come down? Dear me, how bad you look!"

"I am very ill, Jane. You must take me away—to bed."

## CHAPTER XIX.

SIDNEY PETERS.

ONE afternoon, precisely as the great clock in the hall at the Tower struck two, there rattled up the avenue a cab from the head inn at East Bramley, which cab drew up at the front door, as the old butler said, "with all the assurance in the world."

A gentleman sprang lightly out of the cab, and rang a loud peal and gave a thundering knock—both which announcements were wholly unnecessary, as the old butler was already in the act of opening the door to satisfy his curiosity.

"Bless my heart, Mr. Sidney! and is it you, sir?"

"Yes, Stephen; myself—alone and entirely!" replied the new-comer, as he turned from giving orders to the cabman about his portmanteau; "and how is my mother?"

"Her ladyship is looking wonderful, sir. Sir Frederick is not at home, sir; he went out."

"No sort of consequence," replied Sidney Peters, carelessly, as he stepped into the hall with the air of a man who might call the place his own if he chose. "Just lend a hand to the portmanteau, will you? It's rather heavy."

And with this parting exhortation, he ran lightly up the stairs, and was gone.

He was light and agile as a hart or a roe. His figure was slender and tall, but it was faultless as far as outline went. This was something; but his chief beauty was his face.

"As handsome as Sidney Peters," was a

and those who had once seen it wished to see it again.

Nature had done all she could for Sidney Peters. He was about the fairest type of humanity—that is, as far as outward appearance went.

Was he accomplished?



"I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO BORROW BOOKS OF ONE'S WORST ENEMY."

proverb among his acquaintance. His features would have been almost too regular, but for the marvellous play of the mouth and the flashing light of the hazel eyes. As it is, artists had painted that face, and painted it again and again; and women had loved to look upon it;

Oh yes! wonderfully so. He might have made his fortune over and over by his voice and his music. He could play on all kinds of instruments. His handling of the harp and the guitar was perfect. He was an artist, and a poet too, when he chose. And he had a vast

amount of learning, picked up on different occasions and without much trouble.

Trouble—or, rather, painstaking, to speak more correctly—he avoided.

He sprang lightly up stairs, humming some song as he went. His voice was melodious enough to attract a listener in the beginning. A door on the corridor opened, and out came a modest little person, who first looked timidly round, and then said, in a gush of delight, and clapping her hands together, "Sidney!"

He stopped. He was close to her, and she was looking up into his face with such joy and such love, that you could see at once how it was.

"Hush, Amy, you must not speak so loud."

"I forgot. I was so glad. I forgot every thing in the delight of seeing you."

"You are a dear little affectionate darling. Can I come in?"

"Oh yes, I am quite alone." And she opened the door wide to let him in.

It was a small, plainly-furnished room, and she had been sewing at the table. Her finger showed that this was no uncommon employment.

She was very pretty. You could perceive it when you looked at her again. She was fair, with a quantity of hair, which ill-natured people would say had a tinge of red in it. Sidney, being an artist, called it golden. She was a gentlewoman, you could also perceive that in a moment. But not quite on an equality with Sidney either. You might guess that she was in a subordinate position in the household, and so she was. Amy Howard was the humble and much-enduring companion of Lady Peters. From all which you may judge how highly imprudent this interview was.

"I have not seen you for such a long, long time," said Amy, as her lover closed the door and took a chair close by her; "and you never answered my letter, you dear, cruel Sidney."

"No, because it was naughty of you to write when I told you not."

"I could not help it. I thought you had forgotten me." And the girl's voice trembled.

"Nonsense, I think of you every moment. How is it you let this little finger of yours get so rough?"

"Because I sew so much. I was sewing till one o'clock this morning."

"For my mother?"

"Yes."

"What a shame! However, that will all be at an end by-and-by."

Her face flushed with a kind of rapture. Sidney Peters was to her a being raised almost above the sons of earth.

How beautiful he was! How loving! How true! She would sooner have doubted the sun in heaven than doubted him.

But she had not seen him a long, long time, and the lines had not fallen to her in pleasant places, but rather the reverse. Her heart was hungry and restless. It wanted to be satisfied,

to be laid to rest by the words of love—honeyed words which he had dropped in her ear from time to time as opportunity offered. She wanted him to drop them in again.

"Sidney," and her head—a poor tired head it was—was laid on his shoulder. "Sidney, you love me still, do you not?"

"Why do you ask, Amy? Of course I do."

A calm, cool observer might have seen how the girl had cast her all on this one die; that the love of this man would be life or death. But was it so with him? Oh no! there was an unpleasant idea now and then forcing itself into his mind—entanglement.

Still his love had not waxed cold, though it might have passed its heyday. It was sufficiently powerful to suggest all those honeyed speeches and soothing promises in which he was an adept.

He had said once, and that was some time ago—said in plain, honest English, "Amy, will you be my wife?" And he had not gainsaid it at present.

How the girl had lived on those few words! They had been her solace week after week, month after month. They presented to her a future so brilliant and alluring that she could scarce believe in it. They smoothed her path and lightened her sorrows. They were shut up in her own heart. She never might breathe them to any living soul. He had forbidden her strictly and under heavy penalties.

"We must wait, Amy," he had said, "*wait*."

She was tired of waiting. She had home sorrows that pressed upon her; she had a sick mother who could not long continue. In her visits home she had dared to comfort her by hinting of an engagement very advantageous and very blissful. She would not say more, and the poor dying woman hugged the consolation to her heart, and pillowed her aching head upon it.

Amy would not, then, be left desolate, and a long-repeated prayer would be answered.

But who was this unknown person on whom so much depended?

Amy would not utter a word on the subject. She was by nature reticent; she had never told any of her daily griefs and trials; she had a certain pride about her, and a generous desire to spare her mother the recital. Her mother had had woes enough.

But now—now that the end was rapidly approaching—might she not tell? Might not this ban of secrecy be broken? Might not her mother be told that she was the affianced bride of Sidney Peters? Yea, might not the whole world know it?

Her father had been a clergyman in a quiet rural parish far away; he was well born and well connected, but he was not a Morton or a Peters. He had left his widow in deep poverty, and she was dependent, to some extent, on a benevolent fund, provided to meet such cases, and Amy's earnings went to eke out extra comforts. And Amy was his mother's companion.



But love is a sophist, and love knows how to put a plausible face upon it.

Sidney had overruled all these objections—nay, routed them to the winds.

A clergyman, he once told her, stood, by virtue of his sacred office, as high as any worldly rank; and, after all, the elder Peters had been only a knight.

During the intervals of absence, when her lover was gone, and she heard no word or message from him, Amy fed on these things. The words he had uttered were like seed cast in the ground, they sprang up and bore a plentiful harvest.

She had prepared a number of sophisms herself. She wanted to put the matter plausibly before him, and to coax him into acquiescence. Sitting by him, sunning herself, as it were, in the full glory and beauty of his presence, she began to whisper of the matter nearest to her heart; how her mother was fast sinking; how she would then be an orphan, and how—Oh, would he let her tell! Would he let her say, "Sidney Peters is my lover—the man who will be my husband?"

He gave a little start; his arm was round her, and she felt it visibly and palpably tremble. She was herself trembling; her heart beat violently, and her face was white as marble.

"Would he?—would he?"

He was a few minutes before he replied; then he kissed her, sealing, as it were, her lips.

"No more of that, my darling. You ask an impossibility. I told you we must be patient, and wait. Are you getting weary of me, Amy?"

"How can you ask?" She made a passionate gesture, and clung closer to him. "But secrecy is hateful to me, Sidney; it places me in a false position. I am full of terrors and alarms. I want you to acknowledge me," and she laughed a little pitiful laugh that was distressing to hear.

"My darling, I must go!" and he started up. "I hear them calling me; I would not be found here for the world."

She withdrew from him silently, and stood with downcast eyes. He caught her in his arms.

"My own sweet one, have a little more patience with me. Soon, very soon, all will be clear as day. If we disclose the matter now all will be ruined and lost. Can not you trust me?"

"Oh yes, yes! Then you do love me, Sidney? You are not tired of me?" and she spoke eagerly and vehemently.

He kissed her again and again; he thought of nothing that moment but his deep affection for her. Then, as footsteps were unmistakably approaching, he darted through a side door and was gone.

These little episodes in his life were of necessity short and hurried, and, as it were, mid-way between Scylla and Charybdis.

## CHAPTER XX.

### SIDNEY PETERS MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

SIDNEY had soon cleared that part of the house, and was safe shut up in his bedroom.

The interview had roused him considerably. He was more in love with Amy just then than ever. He had a great mind to go straight to his mother and impart to her that piece of intelligence.

Why should he not? He was his own master. He had attained his majority, and there was no one who had power to prevent him from marrying whom he chose—that is, who had legal power.

But with all that, he dare not. There was but one human being who held him in any kind of check, and that was his mother. And the kind of storm which would be raised about his ears appalled him even to think of. Besides, he could not marry on nothing.

He had literally nothing. The elder Peters had plenty of debts; but nothing else seemed to have increased under his rule and governance.

Sidney had splendid abilities, and might make his fortune if he chose to work for it. Hitherto he had not chosen.

"But I will work," thought he, as he made his toilet in haste. "I will go in for something, either under Government, or in the world of letters, or perhaps even the law. I will get rich before the year is out, and marry Amy, see if I don't!"

This resolve pacified a rare and momentary twinge of conscience. He hurried through his toilet, dreading lest his mother should comment on his non-appearance.

She did comment. It was the first thing she said to him.

"Where have you been, Sidney?"

She was in her own private apartment, and she had known of his coming some little time, for lunch was set out for him.

"That is right, mother, I am very hungry."

Before he had said this, he had gone up to her and kissed her.

"Are you not surprised, mother? Don't I seem as if I had dropped from the clouds?" continued he, in a rattling tone, and anxious to divert her attention.

"No, I am not surprised at any thing, except your appetite, my dear," she replied, as Sidney made a furious onslaught on the provisions before him.

"I am very hungry," he repeated; "and what a journey it is down here! Mother, how can you exist in such a place—a lady of your brilliancy and accomplishments? The fact is really astounding."

"You must reconcile your mind to it, my dear," replied she. "Poor Frederick would be very unwilling to let me go."

"Ah, how is poor Frederick?"

Mother and son were accustomed to give him this title.

"He is just as usual," she replied, as though

she might be speaking of an invalid or an imbecile.

"Any thing going on, mother? Any neighbors? Bless me, I should fear not."

"There are a few neighbors," she said, slowly; "just a few. There are the Eastons."

"Who are they?"

"You will soon be able to answer that question for yourself. I am going to drive over after lunch."

"Am I to have the honor of driving you?"

"If you please. Poor dear Frederick has been really very good. He has placed a garden-chaise at my disposal. It just holds two persons."

"Where do the Eastons live?"

"At Bramley Hall, some distance from here—a long drive, in fact; but the ponies go well. Miss Easton has a pair very much like them."

"Is she daughter, or sister, or aunt, or what?"

"She is Mr. Easton's daughter."

"Oh!"

This was all the comment Sidney Peters chose to make. He did not ask any more questions.

"He is a millionaire," said his mother, a few minutes after.

"A what? I beg your pardon; I just lost that observation."

"Mr. Easton is a millionaire."

"Dear me! I wish he had been an artist."

"That is just like you, Sidney!" exclaimed his mother, in displeasure. "Do you think I should—"

She stopped, colored a little behind her rouge, and looked at her watch.

"I am sorry to hurry you, my dear, but I must start directly. Indeed, I hear the ponies."

"Go through the mysteries of the toilet, mother dear, and you will find me ready," said Sidney, laughing. "I must positively have one more taste of poor Frederick's home-brewed."

She swept from the room; she had a sweeping movement intended to be very dignified. When she returned, Sidney looked at her, and the infinitesimal head-gear which stood in the place of a bonnet.

"On my word, Lady Peters, if I call you mother, people will think we are masquerading."

She laughed. Compliment was never displeasing to her, especially on this ground.

"Tell Miss Roberts," said she to her maid, who was in attendance, "to make haste and finish the set of handkerchiefs I gave her. I shall want her on my return."

This command was spoken in the cold, hard tone her ladyship was wont to use to her subordinates. It grated on Sidney's ear.

Poor Amy! He knew her prison-window well. He could fancy, as he glanced up, that he saw a pale face looking anxiously and tearfully out. It disappeared in a moment, long before Lady Peters had time to notice it.

Indeed, she was too much occupied with her varied and costly wrappings to take much notice of any thing.

On the road to Bramley Hall Sidney spoke very little.

There were a few attempts at conversation; but none of them were sustained with any spirit. His heart was not there, it was with Amy—sweet, patient Amy! Her life of toil and weariness should come to an end soon. He was resolved on that. He would trifle and delay no longer. He would boldly plunge into the arena, and fight and win his game of life.

It was a long road, and dreary somewhat, the way to Bramley, but the ponies did it gallantly; then they stopped at the porter's lodge.

"Dear me!" said Lady Peters, suddenly, "there is Miss Easton."

"That handsome dark-eyed girl coming down the carriage-drive—is that Miss Easton?"

"Yes, if you call her handsome," said her ladyship, who rarely allowed good looks in any one of her own sex.

"And that very lovely child; I must have that in a picture," said Sidney, with enthusiasm.

"That child is her niece. You had better give me the reins, and get out and make yourself agreeable."

Sidney alighted, and advanced to meet Adela. Nothing could exceed the grace and courtesy with which he introduced himself to her.

"Before we go a step farther, Miss Easton, I am going to prefer a request. Shall you think I presume on so short an acquaintance?"

Looking into those wonderful eyes, and at that face of rare and surpassing beauty, Adela, with all her coldness and self-possession, was fascinated. She had never seen such a face before—never heard such a voice—never been brought in contact with such an individual as Sidney Peters.

"What was the request?" she asked, and there came a warm, beautiful flush on her cheek.

Adela thawed perceptibly and immediately. When he told her that he wanted to make a picture of the child, she was delighted.

In the hall they met Mr. Easton, who passed them by somewhat hurriedly to attend to Lady Peters.

When he came back, still doing the attentive to her ladyship, it was in time to hear Sidney say, as he stood on the threshold of the little cloak-room, and looked direct at the picture of Margaret—

"What a lovely woman! She must be the mother of the child."

Mr. Easton frowned a little. Adela turned pale; she was remembering her interview with Margaret.

"You are happy to have two such daughters," said Sidney, turning to the master of the house with one of his sunniest smiles, and then glancing at Adela with another.

The beautiful flush came again on Adela's cheek. Her father thought he had never seen her look so handsome.

Certainly she had never been so animated. What powers of conversation she had, as drawn out by Sidney! What a wide range they took,



as they rattled on—these two who had never met before! What a change had come over the cold, proud, self-possessed Adela! How her dark eyes kindled and her cheek glowed! He did not wonder at it. He had never had any visitor half so bewitching as Sidney. Even he unbent, stern as he was, and yielded to the fascination of the man.

As for Lady Peters, she was bent on doing the agreeable.

How charming this dear old Hall was, to be sure! What a delightful room! The look-out was perfection! For her part, she doted on the neighborhood of East Bramley. It was exactly to her taste.

They had most of the conversation to themselves. Adela, having done her duty as a hostess, had got free, and was with Sidney. She wanted to show him the pictures on the walls—the folio of drawings on the table. He had told her he was an artist. And together they went round the room—it was a very large one—and had a blissful kind of converse about many things in the great bay-windows.

Those cold proud hearts are not, after all, so unassailable; and Adela's heart was unguarded. Upon that rock she had placed no sentinels. The position, she thought, was inaccessible; and here was the blind boy laughing in her very face.

It was the most utter break-off to her ordinary life, and habits, and feelings. She longed to keep Sidney as one longs to keep some rare bird which comes to us from tropical climes, flaunting its brilliant plumage, and making its fellows look tame and dull. She was secretly in raptures when she heard her father press the visitors to stay for dinner.

"This is just how we do in this part of the country," he said; "and you have had a long drive. Do stay."

And Lady Peters smiled and nodded, and let herself be persuaded; and made quite an appearance soon after in a shining silk, lustrous and beautiful, and her hair done in the most extreme fashion, and more of it than ever, and in white gloves and satin slippers, and all the paraphernalia complete. And dinner was announced—the plain, family dinner, as Mr. Easton called it—and Sidney led Adela down, following Mr. Easton and her ladyship.

I had forgotten to tell you about Adela. She had put on her gayest attire, and hurried to her room on purpose. She scarce knew why she did it; but it seemed as if some festal-day had come, and she must give in to the spirit of it. She was supremely happy. It was an intoxicating kind of happiness, that had something about it of an evanescent nature, like the too brilliant sunshine of some early morning—too bright to last. But for the time she yielded to it. She let him drop his delicate flatteries and his honeyed words. He did it with no ill intent; it was his nature. He would find out by intuition the key-note, and never failed to strike it. He rarely said a word calculated to ruffle the surface of the mind with which his own was in

contact. He swam always *with* the tide, never against it.

Adela found all go well with her. That her tastes were his tastes, her likings his likings, her pursuits his pursuits. It had been so with many others, but she knew it not. She thought it was mutual sympathy.

"A tolerable evening, considering the kind of folks they are," yawned Lady Peters, as she leaned back in her carriage on the way home. "I wonder what poor dear Frederick will say to us."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### RUTH'S HOUSEKEEPING.

"I SUPPOSE he thinks we are not so good as he is, being a *professional*. But for all that, Mr. Mudford could buy him clean up—stick and stone!"

This sentiment was enunciated by the ironmonger's wife, as she looked round the small and plainly-furnished room in which she and Ruth Vincent were sitting.

Ruth looked pale and jaded, and sat listlessly by the fire, her head leaning on her hand. She was tired with the previous evening's dissipation, and not quite at ease with her conscience. She had not forgotten the sad, careworn expression of her husband's face when she returned home. Something whispered that she had done wrong in not complying with his wishes. Her mental vision was of that limited description which forbids a long-sighted view of affairs. Poor Ruth had lived in too narrow a rut for that. But in her heart she was sorry, and even now was casting about as to how she could make reparation.

Mrs. Mudford was not one of the wisest of women, and she regarded matters from her own point.

"You do quite right in sticking by your old friends, my dear. There is not one of his grand new acquaintances will do you half the good that we shall."

Ruth did not assent to this remark so readily as might be expected. "It was unfortunate," said she, at length, "that the two invitations should have come on one day. If it had not been so, Horace would have been very happy to have accepted yours." And for once she wished Mrs. Mudford away. She wanted to think of her husband.

Mrs. Mudford did go at length, and Ruth sat on, shedding, now and then, a tear or two of vague regret. She felt unhappy and remorseful, and yet she had no clear resolve for the future. She shrank from what Mrs. Mudford called her husband's "grand acquaintance" with invincible dislike. She had no idea as to what her duties should be, or of the actual battle of life which lay before them both. Untutored and uncultured, she had come suddenly into a position of great responsibility. She had never guessed this, in her ignorance and inexperience,

nor did she guess it now. Marriage with Horace seemed to her a state of perfect security and repose. There would be nothing for her to do when she got into this haven.

"Of course, when people are married there is an end to all their troubles," she had thought.

Even now she was resolved it should be so.

about the most serious business in which she had engaged; and it occurred to her, as she rose languidly from her chair, that she would arrange them under the handsome glass shade she had purchased the day before, and show them to Horace on his return.

"Perhaps he will be pleased," she thought,



TOO BRIGHT TO LAST.

No lady in the land, having an establishment of servants to anticipate her slightest wish, could lead a more luxurious life than did the ex-governess of the ironmonger's children. Her occupations were simply amusements to while away her time. She had finished her wax flowers—

"and come out of his gloom. I am sure I am very sorry!"

As she stood a moment, still reflecting on the yesterday's scene, the slatternly servant entered.

"If you please, mum, I'm ready to go the arrands."

"Oh, very well, Martha! You must buy the meat for dinner, as usual."

"Yes, mum."

"I think we will have roast veal to-day; Mr. Vincent says he is getting tired of beef."

"Yes, mum."

"You can get the other things as usual, Martha; and don't be gone till nearly dinner-time, as you were yesterday."

"No, mum."

This was said with a slight redness of the face, and some little confusion.

"Can I take the money, if you please, mum? The butcher says he don't like long payments; and, if you please, there's the bread bill."

"Oh, very well! I must ask Mr. Vincent for some money when he comes home. You can settle with the people when you go out again."

A part of Ruth's domestic economy was never to do a single errand herself.

"If I have a servant I may as well make some use of her," was her favorite motto.

When the girl was gone Ruth busied herself with her wax flowers. She had just put the finishing touch, and was standing to admire the effect, when she heard the front door open, and in came Horace to his dinner.

She went to the head of the stairs.

"Horace!"

"Yes, my dear!"

She thought his voice had still a touch of sadness in it.

"Come up stairs, Horace, I have something to show you."

She spoke cheerfully, and met him at the door with her sweetest smile.

"I have done my wax flowers! Don't they look beautiful?"

"Very."

"I thought you would like them. I have been working so hard. I wanted to give you a surprise."

He put his arm round her, as they stood side by side, and kissed her affectionately. He loved her very dearly, this wife of some few months; they had scarce got over their honeymoon. And how girlish she looked! He had great hopes that she might become, in time, all that he could wish.

"She is so young, and so inexperienced," he thought, tenderly, "and it may never happen again."

"It" referred to the painful circumstance of the two invitations. Still, his better judgment was not hoodwinked, and never would be. It was beginning at the wrong end, he knew, as he glanced round the neglected room. Ruth had other duties to attend to. It would have given him more pleasure to have witnessed the signs of neatness and industry—signs which were systematically absent from his home. He had a haunting suspicion that something, if not every thing, was going wrong. Disorderly, unpunctual, and often wasteful meals; an utter disregard of the thrift and economy so needful in his posi-

tion; all this gave him many an anxious night, when Ruth slept peacefully by his side.

He had said nothing decisive as yet; he had a great dread of fault-finding and altercation; and he had a vast amount of patience and of self-control. He kept hoping things would mend, and that his few gentle hints would be taken. He thought he might offer a suggestion.

"Ruth, my love, don't you think, now you have made us so smart," he began, playfully, "that we might be tidy as well? See, your new piano is an inch thick in dust."

She glanced carelessly round.

"I tell Martha to see to the room every morning. I am sure she has plenty of time."

He glanced round again, but not carelessly as she did.

"My mother was a first-rate housekeeper, Ruth; and she used to say—"

"Oh, that reminds me, Horace," interrupted she; "talking about housekeeping, you must allow me more money."

"More money?" said he, in a surprised tone.

"Yes; I wish you would give me some now!" and she drew a handful of papers from her pocket. "The butcher wants to be paid. I told Martha she should settle with him this afternoon. He need not have been uncivil enough to send the message."

A crimson spot came into her husband's cheek. He was keenly sensitive to the slightest shade of dishonor.

"How is this, Ruth?" he asked, in a tone of grave displeasure. "Why do you allow him to make a bill at all, when I desired you always to pay ready money?"

"But the money goes so fast, Horace; it is like snow in the sun," said she, still carelessly.

"Why do you buy the most expensive joints, and the least profitable?" he continued, as his eye ran over the items. "Half this meat might have sufficed for a family of six; and we are but three."

"You had better ask Martha; she does the marketing."

He folded up the bill in silence. His face had an expression of deep pain and annoyance.

"You had better give me twenty pounds, Horace," said she, coaxingly, "and let me get straight at once; you will never miss it."

He turned quickly round.

"You are mistaken, Ruth; I told you from the first I was not a rich man, but a man with my way to make in life. If this sort of thing is to go on, how can I make it at all?"

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. It was evident she did not believe him.

"I had no idea you were such a screw!" said she, laughing.

He was very angry indeed. For once he had almost lost his temper. But he restrained himself, with a violent effort. He gathered up the papers. He would pay the bills, he said, and they must start afresh. This sort of thing must never happen again.



"You must learn to do your own marketing, Ruth, and not trust to a girl like Martha. She can not be expected to take the same interest that you do in the proper management of the household."

"You chose her, I did not," was Ruth's reply, as the shadow of obstinacy began to settle

He was pacified; perhaps too soon. The sight of the tears which shone in the dovelike eyes completely disarmed him. When Ruth came up to him caressingly, and tried all her little blandishments to make him forget the scene which had just occurred, he allowed himself to be diverted from his sterner mood. She



"DON'T THEY LOOK BEAUTIFUL?"

over her face. By this time he was only too well acquainted with that shadow. He sighed, as he went down stairs.

She heard it, and came quickly after him.

"Don't be angry, Horace. I am very sorry. I will do the best I can for the future."

was his wife, his embodiment of domestic felicity—the sweet gentle girl he had been desiring for his help-meet. Their human destinies were bound together. Apart from her, he had no interests. She was sure to improve, he always fell back on the suggestion. This lesson would

do her good; in a few years she would outgrow her inexperience, and become a practical and useful woman, as well as a loving wife.

As for the clouds which loomed on the horizon, they might never come at all.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

He staid at home rather longer than usual. Ruth exerted herself to the utmost to please him. She caressed him, she chatted with him, she even sung to him—a rare indulgence now, for Ruth had discarded her music entirely. He was sorry when he had to go. This he thought was delightful, and what home should be. Latterly she had been too completely busied in some exciting novel to attend to him in the least.

The time slipped by, however, and he could not neglect his business. He walked briskly away to his office, feeling more hopeful and more cheerful than he had done for some time.

The first thing he did was to sit down to his desk, and bring the handful of bills from his pocket. He opened them one by one and spread them before him.

He was a man who never flinched from an unpleasant duty. He would take the matter in hand at once. He would see how deep the mischief had gone, and how far it was in his power to remedy it.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth! do you wish to pluck down your house in the very beginning?"

The bills were far heavier and far more inexcusable than he expected—in fact, they showed a wanton carelessness and extravagance that quite shocked him. Ruth had never cast up the total. Twenty pounds would not cover it, any more than five would!

He sat a few moments, leaning his head on his hand. He thought of his hard studies, his midnight labors, his struggles to get a footing in the world, and to earn an honest livelihood. He thought of his careful, thrifty mother, and his industrious sisters, of the slender income on which they had been brought up and educated, and his heart felt sore within him.

What kind of a future lay before him, if this sort of thing were to go on? It was impossible for him to meet all these expenses. His house had been furnished partly out of a hoard of saved money—a hoard put by for a rainy day. But, in that matter he had been deceived in the total. It was impossible to blind himself to the fact that he should very soon be in difficulties.

Somehow, clients had not come in lately so quickly as they used to do. He had lost much of his popularity in the town; and if he lost his credit too! He shuddered at the bare idea. There was one hope alone which cheered him. A richer and better client than had yet entered his office had been half promised to him.

There was a wealthy man lately come to the town to manage the affairs of a company.

He was a friend of Mrs. Jules, and Mrs. Jules, in the palmy days of her friendship, had promised to introduce him to Horace. A solicitor was wanted to arrange all the legal matters connected with the company. Mrs. Jules had named Horace, and it was almost an understood thing that he was to be engaged. If so, the post was a lucrative one, and would bring a good income and a very extended connection. On this account, as well as on many others of a less interested nature, he would not have offended Mrs. Jules for the world.

Every day he expected to hear tidings from Mr. Gilbert. Nothing binding had yet passed between them, and Horace grew increasingly anxious as he sat pondering, with the dismal array of debts spread open before him. His anxiety grew to fever-heat. The appointment at this juncture would seem to be a providence.

All at once he swept away the bills hurriedly into his desk. A carriage had stopped at the door. He saw with a beating heart the face of Mrs. Jules at the carriage-window.

A bounding sense of joy quickened every pulse. Women are always generous, he thought; they soon forgive and forget. No doubt the widow was come to bring him good news. It was very kind of her; all his difficulties would be tidied over. In fact, a sunny gleam broke from behind the cloud.

Mrs. Jules entered, smiling and splendid. Her dress was magnificent; for she seemed to have taken a pleasure in putting on all her finery. Her manner was a little hurried and excited, but that was usual with her when conducting any affair of importance.

"How very kind of you to come!" said Horace, impulsively, and replying to his own thoughts. "I was almost afraid I should never see you again."

"What! were you going to leave the town?"

"Oh, no! but I thought—"

He stopped. There was something in the lady's face which disconcerted him. He began rather to scent mischief.

"And pray how is Mrs. Vincent?" asked she, abruptly, and bringing her sharp bright eyes to bear upon his face, with a meaning and a poignancy that made his cheeks tingle.

"Quite well, I thank you."

"Of course, I never dare hope for the pleasure of seeing her. Of course, with her numerous engagements," added Mrs. Jules, laying an ominous stress on the last word, "it is hardly to be expected."

Horace colored painfully; then, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he said, "May I ask you if you have heard from your friend, Mr. Gilbert?"

"Oh, yes! and that was what I came about. Dear me, Mr. Vincent, what changes do happen in East Bramley, to be sure! Who do you think is going to begin practice as a lawyer?"

"I can not guess," replied Horace, anxiously.

"I am sure I should never have guessed,

though it is all through me the thing came about. I told his mother—she is an old friend of mine, and of my mother's before me, and as fine a woman as can be seen anywhere—I said, 'It is of no use, Lady Peters, you must put your pride and your title in your pocket. The young man must live, and where can he find a better opening than in East Bramley?' You know Mr. Standfast is retiring?" added Mrs. Jules, stopping to take breath.

"I did not," replied Horace, calmly. But his lips were pale, and his voice quivered. He began to see it all now; it was a woman's revenge.

"Well, I talked to her; for Sidney Peters is rather a favorite of mine. Do you know him?"

"I do not," again replied Horace.

"He is the most magnificent specimen of humanity that can be conceived. He will turn the heads of us poor folks in East Bramley, with nothing but his beauty," continued the widow, volubly. "And he is so clever. Well, Mr. Standfast's connection is first-rate, and ought to be represented by a gentleman. Sidney Peters is that, and he is sure to marry into one of our first families. He is not the man to make a blunder in a matter of that sort."

Horace winced palpably at these repeated stings; but he said nothing.

"So we settled it at last. Her ladyship is very proud, and she talked disdainfully of the position of a lawyer in a little country town; but I persuaded her. The fact is, poor Sidney has not a sixpence, and really I wanted to get him for East Bramley. One by one people drop out of our circle; they marry or they die, until at last nobody will be left."

Horace was still silent. He knew what this meant. It meant that he had dropped out.

"The long and the short of the matter is," continued Mrs. Jules, "for I see I am taking up your valuable time—the long and the short is, that Mr. Peters is going to take some offices at the corner of Bank Street—a first-rate situation—and set up in the profession. He will be a neighbor of yours, Mr. Vincent."

"I perceive so," replied Horace.

"You will find him quite an acquisition. He can do almost every thing. And he was educated for the law. In fact, he was articled to a relative of mine. I hope he won't run away with any of your clients."

"I hope not."

"And that reminds me—just the point in hand—my friend Mr. Gilbert—"

Horace held his breath. She had come to it at last.

"He is a friend of the Peters family—a very old friend indeed."

She paused, and trifled a few minutes with her bracelet. She had expended her venom, and now she hardly liked to go on.

Horace waited a reasonable time, and then he filled up the space. "Therefore Mr. Gilbert wishes to employ him."

"You have guessed exactly right, my dear Mr. Vincent," said the lady, looking up with a beaming smile, "Mr. Gilbert does."

"Of course," began Horace, in rather a choking voice. Then he stopped. He hardly knew what he meant to say.

Mrs. Jules rose, in all the magnificence of her costly array. He knew it was the last visit she would ever pay him; the last time, perhaps, that they should meet. He knew why she had come, and he knew the profound depth, and length, and breadth of the yawning breach which Ruth had made. Mrs. Jules, from his friend, had become his enemy. She had taken away his client, and given him instead a rival. She might never cease to persecute him to the very end. Have not kingdoms and dynasties been destroyed by the folly or the malice of a woman?

When she drove off in her carriage, he sat for a time as in a deep reverie. Painful, anxious thoughts brought to his face lines and marks of care. After a time he roused himself. His business must be attended to; and he opened his desk hurriedly. It was full of the papers he had thrust there—the bills run up by his wife.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"SHE GETS MORE HANDSOME EVERY DAY!"

"To me!—does Miss Howard wish to speak to me?" asked Lady Peters, with the air of an autocrat.

"Yes, my lady, she does. If you please, my lady, Miss Howard has had a telegram from home. They want her to go directly."

"That is so reasonable—so like those kind of people," said her ladyship. "Send Miss Howard to me."

A few minutes after, a quiet little person, with a very pale face, and eyes red with weeping, stood in the doorway.

"Now, Miss Howard," began Lady Peters, loftily, "what is all this about?"

"My lady," replied the quiet figure, in a calm, steady tone, as of a person who was accustomed to control her feelings, in that presence at least, "I have received a message from home, to say that my mother is dying. If I miss the train, I may never see her again."

As she finished her sentence, a tear rolled down her cheek; otherwise, she maintained an outward composure that was very commendable.

"Which means that you wish to go home, I suppose?"

"If you please, my lady."

"I don't please. I have no choice in the matter," said Lady Peters, in a pettish tone. "Of course, it is most unreasonable to lose one's—one's dependents," added her ladyship, at a loss for the right niche in which to fit her companion; "but of course you must go."

"What is the matter?—who must go?" asked a cheery voice close behind Amy.

Amy had presence of mind. She neither started nor made the slightest demonstration. But there passed close by her, as he strode into the room, Sidney Peters.

"Nothing that concerns you, Sidney, in the least," replied his mother. "You can go, Miss Howard. James had better take the dog-cart and drive you to the station."

"Thank you, my lady."

"You must come back as soon as you can. It is very inconvenient to spare you. There! go along."

"Where is she going?" asked Sidney, abruptly, his eye resting on the door, which had just closed behind Amy.

"Going? Home, of course."

Lady Peters was displeased, and she spoke irritably.

"Are you parting with her?"

"If I were, I can not conceive why the fact should interest you in the least."

"Of course not, only one likes to know."

"Well, then, her mother is ill, I suppose. I won't have another companion with a sick relative. It is the most inconvenient thing in the world!"

Sidney was silent, for the moment conscience-stricken. The piece of news just imparted suggested a train of unpleasant reflections. Could his lady mother have guessed them, her peace of mind would have been somewhat disturbed. As it was, she dismissed the subject as unworthy of longer consideration.

"So you are off to Bramley Hall, I suppose, Sidney?"

This was said with restored good-humor.

"I—I did think of going," stammered Sidney, embarrassed and preoccupied.

"Of course you will go. Miss Easton is giving you one of her sittings. When shall you have finished the picture?"

"I don't know. I can hardly tell."

"Because you will have very little time after this week."

"Yes, I shall have very little time," repeated Sidney, mechanically.

"I do hope, Sidney, you are in earnest about your profession, and mean to work."

"Work! I should think I do," exclaimed he, turning round with sudden energy. "I will work night and day, rather than be in the disgraceful position in which I find myself."

"Humph! there is no especial disgrace, Sidney. You were brought up a gentleman. It was your birthright."

"But idleness was not. Good heavens! what a life I have led!" exclaimed he, struck by remorse, and with ten thousand evils of omission and commission pressing upon him. "But I will do better, mother, I will—"

"Follow my better feelings, and marry Miss Howard," he was about to say. But he stopped himself in time. He thought he would see Amy before she went, and he hurried out on purpose.

He fancied she would be looking out for him

in the corridor, just to say one word. He knew what that word would be, and the recollection made him pause, even in the midst of his virtuous resolutions.

While he thought thus, Amy was gone. He heard the wheels of the dog-cart grinding upon the gravel-walk, and he felt a sense of relief. The fact is, he hated a turbulent atmosphere, or any thing approaching to a scene. He was all for peace and quietness, and, if he had been candid enough to confess it, for ease and self-indulgence.

He shook off his anxiety and his remorse with that versatility of character which so much distinguished him. He went to his room, packed up his sketching materials, and, ordering the carriage, drove off to Bramley Hall.

It was not his first visit by many. He was going to complete a sketch which he had begun of Adela and her niece. She was ready for him. When he entered the room, she was sitting in the proper attitude, the child on her knee.

"She gets more handsome every day," thought Sidney to himself, and the tearful face of Amy faded for the time from his remembrance.

Adela was indeed a splendid woman. Since her acquaintance with Sidney, the cold, chilling demeanor, which threw a kind of Northern fog over her beauty, had melted away. There was a warmth and tenderness about the beaming eyes, a glow on the cheek, an absence of the stately reserve which had characterized her, and been somewhat repelling.

No word of love had passed between them, but Adela thought it must come. Why was he here day after day? Why did he fascinate her with those wonderful eyes of his? Why did he take such pleasure in her society? Why did he caress the child? Why were her pursuits his pursuits, her delights his delights, her antipathies his antipathies?

Oh, yes; it would come. If not— But she dared not cast a single glance towards that blank, desolate region—the land of ruined hopes!

"There," said Sidney, after working for a time in silence—"there, that will do for to-day. I will not tax your patience too long, Miss Easton."

"I am not in the least tired," said Adela, quickly.

"But I am tired of making you sit in that constrained attitude;" and he laid down his brush. "I should like music now."

Adela's face flushed with delight.

"You will—you will get rid of the child," continued Sidney, in rather a hesitating manner.

Get rid of the child! A vague feeling of self-reproach came to the mind of Adela. It was the very thought that had been suggested to her.

Time had been, and that but lately, when the words would have sounded like treason; now she rang the bell and sent away her niece with a feeling of relief. Dear as the child was to her, here was one dearer still.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## WHAT OF MARGARET'S CHILD?

SIDNEY laid down a book he had been reading. There was a hush and expectancy in Adela's mind. It had come so very near,

on her cheek, the soft light in her eye. She was very beautiful, he thought. He had guessed her secret. He knew that she loved him. Had he not the art of fascinating women, almost whether he would or no?

And Amy was gone. It was not a bad thing



SUE WAS SITTING IN THE PROPER ATTITUDE, THE CHILD ON HER KNEE.

this thing which was to gladden her life forever!

Instinct seemed to whisper that he had something to say. It could not help but be so. There was no middle course to be adopted. It was too late for that.

He looked at her as she sat, the warm glow

either, now the momentary pang was over. The marriage would have been unsuitable in every respect. He had been very foolish—need he set the seal on his folly?

Amy would soon forget him. He might be her friend, and get her another husband. That would be far the best thing to do. And such a



simple, pliable little creature would easily be moulded to his will.

This girl was of a different stamp. This highly cultivated mind and developed nature would suffer, and must. For there was no pliability in Adela. Yet he was sad too, and remorseful, and hesitated; and his better feelings were not wholly silenced, and he had half a mind to go away as he had done before, and say not a word—half a mind to seek out his fortune, and then Amy!

But as Amy had receded from his mind, so Adela advanced. He was tired of indecision. His mother's influence was wholly on this side. Interest, and even affection, urged him. The winds in their courses were not more capricious or versatile than Sidney Peters.

He came near to her. There was a vacant chair by her side, and he dropped into it. The next thing he did was softly to lay his hand on hers, and arrest it.

"Adela!"

She turned away her face. For the moment, she seemed to be lost in an ocean of delight. She could not have spoken for the world. It was come at last, that bright, golden time when Sidney was about to tell her that he loved her!

Were the words of love ever so sweet as now—ever, she thought, in the whole world's history, as when spoken by Sidney Peters? But did he tell her that he loved her? Oh, yes! He used the old time-worn phrases. I need not repeat them. They are ever new to those who listen, and they came on Adela's ear like a strain of sweet music.

He thought he was in earnest. As he looked on her lovely face, full of changeful dyes and colors as the blood came and went, he thought he loved her. He thought he could give up all for her sake—even Amy.

She had not spoken yet, and when she broke the silence, it was to reply calmly, and without apparent agitation. She was not demonstrative, even now; but she said a few low, heartfelt words, which were quite a sufficient answer. In that moment her whole past and present seemed swallowed up. She thought of nothing else—not even Margaret's child.

He kissed her tenderly. She was his own—his Adela. With her came ease, and riches, and luxury. But, to do him justice, this idea was not suggested to him. He loved her for her own sake; at least, so he fancied. Had there been rough places, he would have crossed them; had there been dearth or poverty, he would have endured it, just at that moment.

But Adela, though carried away by a full and flowing tide, had yet the resolution to look back. For a few moments, indeed, she had abandoned herself to the present bliss. But what was that fair young face gazing at her, as it were, reproachfully from yonder shore—what of Margaret's child?

Words uttered long since came swiftly across the intervening space—came sharp and shrill.

"The responsibility is yours. What if you marry?"

No matter; she will meet the point at once. The responsibility is *hers*. She accepted it deliberately, in cool blood, and with all its difficulties. She is pledged to her sister, and she will not fail her. Still trembling with her new-found happiness, she will lay the whole before Sidney—before her love.

She knows how pitiful, how merciful he is. Does he not love the child, and call her a cherub? Has he not caressed her? Is there not room in his heart for both?

"Sidney!" She had never called him so before, and a blush rose to her cheek. "Sidney; there is one difficulty—there is—"

"No! no! not one!" and he kissed her again and again. "How can there be? Our path is as smooth and as joyous—"

"I know—I know!" she interrupted, hastily, and eager to set her mind at rest. "But, Sidney, listen to me. There is Margaret's child."

"Well," said he, coldly, as if the subject were irrelevant; "well?"

"I am her only guardian, dear. I am pledged never to forsake her. She has no one in the world but me—"

"And her mother, sweet one. Send her to her mother. What do we want with Margaret's child?"

Adela trembled, and her voice grew sharp with anxiety.

"I told you the story, Sidney. Do you not remember?"

"Oh, yes, dearest, I remember; but why allude to it now, just when we are so happy? What has it to do with us?"

"Every thing to do with *me*, Sidney, *every thing*. I can not forsake her; nay, I will not. She must have a home with us, Sidney, with us."

"I do not see the necessity of it, Adela."

"Oh, but—" she began, eagerly.

He stopped her. "We will talk of it another time, dearest. The subject need not be discussed now. It will be all right, no doubt. Only do not press the point when I have so much to tell. Another day, dearest—another day."

She was silent. She could not help it. This man, so full of wiles and subtleties, had her in his power. She let the hour run on, as it were, rippling over golden sands, and to the sound of harp and dulcimer. Her truth, her faith, her loyalty were held back by a kind of spell. Would it be forever?

Had you seen her, some time later, kneeling by the pillow on which lay a fair head with a glory of golden hair scattered round it; and had you heard her pray for help and guidance, yes, and for stern resolution, too, you would have said not. You would not have feared then for the fate of Margaret's child.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## IS SHE NOT IN DUTY BOUND?

ADELA did not see her father at breakfast the next morning. He had gone out early on business. She was not sorry. It would be her duty to tell him what had happened; and till she had had another interview with Sidney she wished to keep silence.

Her mind was filled with blissful thoughts. Of her nearness to the greatest human happiness, and of the treasures which the future held in its grasp, she did not doubt. Still, amid all this, there was a secret misgiving, which she fled from, and yet returned to. It was like a sunken rock over which the tide was now flowing, now receding. Did she fear that he would insist on the separation from Margaret's child? She put the thought from her again and again. She knew it could not be; that on such a rock as this, her vessel, with all its gallant sails, would go down and perish!

She had ensconced herself in the room where she usually passed her mornings. She had her work—her books. There was the piano, the harp, the lute, on which Sidney played almost divinely. She did not think either harp or lute would be touched that morning. Her fingers were unsteady. She tried her harp, but the string broke. Was it ominous?

Ah! he is coming, and she moves away from the broken string, and stands listening. His step is on the stairs. He needs no one to announce him. He is here.

He came in hastily, and approached as if to claim her as his betrothed. "Adela, my love!" She stepped back a little. She had nerved herself greatly for this interview. She was resolved to make all straight and clear. That there should be no elements of mischief afterwards, when it would be too late.

There was a helpless being whose fate was absolutely in her hands; whose weal or woe followed closely on every step of her life. How much more on this step—the most important of them all?

The fate of her sister's child was no trifling matter, to be dismissed with a few hurried words. She was resolved to do it justice, at any cost. Yet how eagerly her heart bounded to her beloved. Apart from Sidney, life itself would scarce be tolerable.

He was struck with her apparent coldness. He began in a tone of tender reproach, but she still held back.

"One moment, Sidney—one moment. There was a subject started yesterday and left unfinished. Do you remember?"

"I remember nothing but one great subject, Adela," he replied, still advancing, and his eyes fixed on her with all the magic of their beauty. "Every other topic was blotted from my mind."

What should she do? Should she abandon herself to the enchantment, and fling all else away? Should she impose no terms, and care for nothing but his love? What, then, would

happen if she did? Perhaps terms from him the thought of which would bring to herself pain and remorse; to the little hapless one, abandonment, perhaps ruin!

How she had cherished it! How she had shielded it. Its little feet were used now to tread softly. It had no one in the world but herself!

The waves would toss it, and the storms rend it, if once driven from that refuge. No! there was a trust to be fulfilled, a position to be defended. Come weal, come woe, she was in duty bound!

"Sidney!" and as she spoke her heart was swayed to and fro like some noble tree in a storm—"Sidney, I am speaking of my sister's child."

"Indeed?"

He said it coldly and carelessly.

"I must retain the guardianship of the child," she continued. "It is better to be explicit on this point, that there may be no misunderstanding afterwards. You know her history?"

"I think I remember something, though in a dim and hazy kind of manner. I do not want you to repeat it, dearest; far more pleasant topics might be found—"

"No," she interrupted him by saying, "none to me of so much importance at this moment, Sidney. Because no circumstance ought to have power to sever me from the child."

"What do you wish, Adela?"

"That I may love and cherish this helpless, fragile little being, as I have done heretofore; that the change may make no difference in her fate; that the trust I have undertaken may not be violated. This is what I wish, Sidney."

She spoke earnestly. She wanted him to acquiesce—nay, to promise. If he did, all would be right, and her vessel might bound onward joyously.

But he did not promise, neither did he acquiesce. "She was not wise," he said, "to accept such a trust. Where was the mother of the child? Where was Margaret?"

Her heart failed her. She had fancied he would cast at once the shield of his protection round the "little cherub," as he used to call her. What could it matter to him? She was rich. She had intended to make provision for the child. All she desired was the permission still to protect it. She wondered that he should hesitate; but he did.

"My Adela," he said, at length, in a joyful tone, "I have found out the solution of the difficulty! Personally, I do not object to the child; but I want you, dearest, wholly to myself. I am exacting—but then I am your lover."

The smile, the glance of the eye, had almost shaken her. She could scarce refrain from throwing herself into his arms. She was drawn to him by a mighty and irresistible attraction. But she held back.

"What is the solution, Sidney?" she asked, anxiously.

"Let Ethel be adopted by your father. The thing is most opportune. He will be lonely—"

"Oh, no—no!" she exclaimed.

"Why not, my sweet one? Grandfathers always dote upon—"

"No—no," interrupted she eagerly; "not in this case. The error of the mother has been visited on the child too severely."

"But if I talk the matter over with him."

"It would be quite useless, Sidney."

And she pressed her hand to her forehead.

"Then let it be so, Adela—let it be so; and let the subject rest;" and he again advanced towards her, resolved on silencing her once and forever.

Surely she could trust him? Surely she need have no doubt or fear! Only let there be no renewal of a discussion which kept them from happier thoughts. What could she do? How could she resist his powers of fascination? How could she put him from her when the web of his enchantments was spun so strong?

She could not; and on rippled the golden hours, and on flowed the tide, bearing her along. As for the danger of the sunken rock, she thought she had escaped it.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AMY'S SECRET.

THE train stopped at a little out-of-the-way station, in the bleak, open country. Amy alighted on the platform just as a young man, in the dress of a clergyman, came up to meet her.

"Amy, you are come, then. You have been prompt."

"Yes, Reuben; of course I came."

"Is this all your luggage?"

"Yes, Reuben, dear, I did not know how long—"

"Exactly. Now, Amy, I will carry the bag. Can you walk?"

"Oh, yes."

"Come along, then."

Nothing more was said, and the two walked briskly out of the station. It was a dark, foggy, dismal night, and the stretch of open country looked very uninviting.

"You are not afraid, Amy?"

"Oh, no!—not with you, dear."

"They were silent a few minutes; then the girl said, in a trembling voice, "Reuben, how is our mother?"

"There has been no change within the last hour," replied Reuben, gravely.

He had a grave, serious manner. When Amy gave a little sob, he turned to her and said, "You should not weep, Amy, but rather rejoice. Think how she has suffered."

"I know—I know!" and Amy wept silently a few moments. Then she dried her eyes, and said, affectionately, "Dear Reuben, what a solace it is to have you here!"

"I felt it right to come, Amy; but I must not stay. The vicar is absent, and the whole work of the parish is on my shoulders."

He had rather a stern manner. There was a firm—almost a hard expression about his mouth. It was evident that his sister stood in awe of him.

She walked on again in silence. The silence was not broken until a twinkling light shone in the distance. The light was from the window of a lone house in the fields. Here Amy's mother had been brought for the benefit of the country air, and because she could not exist in the stifling atmosphere of the great city where Reuben dwelt. Here, as it happened, the poor sick lady had come to die.

When the light from the window became apparent through the fog and darkness, Reuben slackened his pace. The girl's heart began to throb in a tumultuous and agitated manner. She knew what he was about to say.

"Amy," said the stern, grave man at her side, "before we enter yonder house, I have somewhat to say to you."

His manner was solemn and impressive. It was so at all times. The life he led fostered this solemnity. His lot was cast amid crowded neighborhoods, where humanity toiled, struggled, suffered, and died.

Amy had not replied to his speech. Her eyes were cast down, and a crimson flush had risen to her cheek. It was a subject on which she dreaded to enter with her brother Reuben.

"Amy, it is time that I, as your natural guardian and protector, was made acquainted with your actual position; nor would it be consistent with your filial duty to allow our mother to depart with this mystery unsolved. What is the name of the man whom you have promised to marry?"

Nothing could be plainer or more pointed than the question. Amy did not answer it; she walked on in silence.

He detained her with a firm hand. They stood on the dark, solitary road, nothing in sight save the twinkling lamp in the sick woman's chamber; none to overhear them but God!

"I will not let you proceed, Amy, until you have told me."

She knew how resolute he was, and she trembled.

"I have promised, Reuben—I have promised," said she, hurriedly. "Can I break my word?"

"Yes, if your promise was an error, and will lead you into evil—if duty commands you to break it."

"I dare not!" and she shuddered. Something told her—for in moments like these the veil was rent from her eyes—something told her there was a yawning gulf between her gay, gallant lover and this stern man beside her; and she dared not think of the steps Reuben might choose to take.

"Amy," said he, as she still persisted in her silence, "I can not detain you longer, or it may

be too late. She will ask you. She can not die in peace till you have told her. If you still refuse—"

"Well?" said Amy, a mortal dread at her heart; for the pause Reuben made was ominous—"well?"

"I shall think it my duty to make inquiries of Lady Peters."

She wrung her hands in despair. Oh, this would be worse than all! This was what she had dreaded with exceeding fear. Sidney might cast her off forever!

Stay! He had once said to her, when she had put before him a case like this—he had said, "Of course, if your mother is actually on her death-bed, I might make some concession."

She would whisper her secret in her mother's ear. She would not tell Reuben. Oh, no! not for worlds! If she must explain, it should be to her mother.

They entered the house. At least, she would see her mother alone. Her face was white; her eyes troubled; her demeanor agitated. Her brother did not unbend to her. It had been better, perhaps, if he had. His behavior was rather chilling and repelling. He hated this ban of secrecy; he was open and truthful as the day. Only evil "lurks in hidden corners," he would say; and the presence of evil, once suspected, he would probe it down to the very root!

Their mother had asked for Amy repeatedly. The dying woman knew that her hours were numbered. She did not fear to die. She was of that happy company who have made their peace with God. Her life had passed through great tribulation, and now there shone before her the crown of victory. But the mother's heart clung to Amy. She longed to have this one barrier removed; this withheld confidence restored. Her eyes, dim though they were, asked the question as the girl entered—

"Who is he, Amy—who?"

Amy sat down by the bedside. Her limbs trembled; her heart swelled almost to bursting. She kissed the dear face, so pallid, so sunk, so deathlike, and yet so full of loving, anxious tenderness. She laid her weary head upon the pillow; she felt for the moment as if she would fain have died too!

"Amy," came the faltering whisper—a whisper faint indeed, but clear and distinct, "Amy, will you not tell even *now*?"

No one was there. She had glanced hurriedly round.

"Mother, darling, if I tell you, it must not be repeated. I have promised, dear. All will go wrong if it is blazoned abroad too soon."

The eager eyes were fixed upon her, and the lips moved. She could catch the faint sound of words, still imploring her to tell. How could she resist? How could she let her mother die, and not in peace? Would not the remembrance haunt her many a day?

No, no! it was a desperate alternative; if it robbed her of her love, her heart would break.

But she must risk all; and she bowed her head and placed her lips to her mother's ear.

"Mother, I will tell you. It is Sidney Peters!"

A deep but suppressed groan made her turn quickly and fearfully round. The groan came from Reuben—her brother Reuben.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### HORACE TAKES MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HANDS.

THERE are some moments in life when a man is stunned, and feels as though the tide of events must go by unstemmed. Such moments do not last when the man is young, and the soul is full of energy and purpose. He rises, looks round, it may be sadly, but with the resolve to meet the difficulty and overcome it. Such was the case with Horace Vincent. He was stunned. He felt that his marriage had been a mistake; that his happiness would be wrecked; that, unless he strove mightily, his fortunes would be wrecked as well. But he rose, resolved, if possible, to meet and turn aside the giant wave that was approaching.

He looked very haggard. He seemed older, by many years, than he did since we first knew him. And he had to think some time before he could arrive at any satisfactory conclusion.

At length the conclusion came. He had reckoned up the bills many times, as though the process might have reduced the total to a less alarming amount. But there it was, neither greater nor smaller.

Well, he must meet it. He unlocked a small cash-box, and took out some money. There was not much left when he had done so, but that fact was beyond his control.

He would settle these accounts, and then he knew what he would do. His face had a certain sternness about it. He was driven to a kind of desperation. She was young, but, then, how reckless! It was too expensive a process to wait until experience came. He must take the reins out of those incompetent hands, and govern for himself. He would rather not have taken the step he was planning. It grieved him to the heart. When he entered his home, so recently fitted up to be the abode of domestic joy, and remembered how soon his hopes had been crushed, he could have wept.

The tea was waiting for him. He glanced round the untidy room, and at the book Ruth had just laid down, and also at her serene, smiling face, calm as ever. He had been racked with anxiety; she had been reading her novel without a pang!

"I must give up the subscription to that library," he said, as he sat down. "There is scarcely a book in it worth the reading."

"How you talk, Horace! I should be moped to death without my novels."

That was just the point at which he was aiming. But he bided his time. He did not wish to introduce the subject otherwise than kindly and courteously; and he had much to say to her that evening.

When tea was over, and the door had closed

"You will oblige me by laying down your book, Ruth; I want to have a little talk with you."

"Well," she said, curtly, and closing her book, indeed, but keeping her finger in it as a marker.



"MOTHER, I WILL TELL YOU. IT IS SIDNEY PETERS!"

behind the servant, he began. Ruth had taken her novel again, and was settling herself in her old place, her feet on the fender.

"Ruth, do you never sew?" asked he, rather abruptly.

"I do sometimes," she replied, her eyes fixed on her book.

"You neither like sewing nor housekeeping, it seems to me, Ruth."

"You forget that I was only a governess."

"True."

And he was silent a moment. When he began again it was in a softer tone. He might have been unjust to her. Had he not married

her with his eyes open? Was it not his fault as much as hers?

"Ruth, I have been thinking what will be best for us to do. The cares of a household, and its varied duties, are not to your taste. Well, suppose you lay them aside; suppose we go into lodgings."

"What! back again to that poky little room of Mrs. Perkins?"

"No, dear, fortunately there is no necessity for that. An old servant, who married from our house years ago—that is, from my father's house, Ruth—has been left a widow, and is come to settle in East Bramley. She has rooms to let, and I think they will just suit us."

Ruth made no reply. He could not see her face, it was turned towards the fire.

"I know what I shall do. The circumstance seems providential. A gentleman has been inquiring for a furnished house; I happened to see the advertisement. Now, if all goes well, he may be glad to take this house off our hands just as it is. I do not think we can do better, Ruth."

She did not answer. He moved a little, so that he could catch a glimpse of her face. The obstinate expression was settling rapidly over it. Still he went on.

"Then we can take possession of Jane Wilson's comfortable lodgings; they are very pleasant rooms indeed, Ruth; and Jane can cook, and market, and keep house, and the little wife will have no more trouble."

He waited for a response to this speech, but none came.

"What do you say to it, Ruth?"

"I shall not go!" she replied shortly, and almost rudely.

"But if I wish it, dear—if this step will be the only means of saving me from serious embarrassment?"

"You should allow me more money, Horace. I had no idea that you were such a screw."

It was the second time that she had used the expression. He was annoyed, but he passed over it. The beginning of strife was, he knew, like the letting out of water. He repeated to her that he was not rich; that, in fact, owing to her ignorance of household management, and her too great expenditure, he was fast drifting into difficulties. He softened the facts by telling her that she was young, and that time would work wonders. He did not wish to be harsh and discouraging, but her education in these matters must be conducted on a less costly scale. She would have opportunities of learning, without the responsibility, and without risk of failure.

He thought he had put it before her as clearly and as fairly as possible; and he looked for the obstinate expression to give way. But it lingered, and in full force.

She had no idea, she said, of going into lodgings, now she was married. She always thought that women, when they were married, had no more trouble about money. Their husbands gave them as much as they wanted.

He could not disabuse her of this idea, and after a time he left off trying. But then another phase of his domestic life became apparent—Ruth was sulky. He would have liked to carry on the discussion in a friendly spirit, and, when it was over, to spend a domestic evening; but in this hope he was mistaken. Ruth sat over the fire, not reading, to be sure, but in a state of gloom and depression. Once or twice he saw the tears trickling down her face, and he went to her and tried to comfort her. But she would not speak!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### PROMPT MEASURES.

THE office in which Horace transacted his business had, as we hinted before, become to him a refuge; nay, he was beginning to regard it as a kind of home. Here he laid his plans, and took cognizance of his position, and even was wont to hug his sorrows. For that sorrow, in its worst form, was coming upon him; there was little room to doubt.

He had hoped that by the morning, Ruth would have regained her good-temper; for on this sole characteristic he had rested much of his hope.

"At least, Ruth has an even temper," he had said to himself many a time. And he had tried to contrast her favorably with more gifted women who had an infirmity of the opposite nature.

But this favorite theory was in danger of being upset. Ruth had not regained her serenity. Her usually smiling face was overcast. She was sullen, and refused to speak except in monosyllables. He had to leave her in this mood, and betake himself to the business of the day. He had grown firmer and a trifle sterner. He meant to carry his purpose, in spite of a sullen humor and a few black looks.

"It is this step or ruin!" he said to himself.

As soon as he could, he sallied forth in quest of Jane Wilson's lodgings. And here, for a brief space, his troubled heart found a kind of peace.

The good woman had known him from a child. She was secretly displeased that her young master had not married a "lady born;" but still she was quite willing to receive him into her house; and it was a quiet abode, just what he liked. Its cleanliness and order, after his own disorderly home, were refreshing. He began to think that, after all, his affairs were not quite desperate; that in this retreat free from the cares and duties which seemed to embarrass her, Ruth, too, might be happy.

The woman knew how it was, but she held her peace. "He don't break up his home for nothing," said she, when he was gone. "I'll be bound that girl he's married don't know her right hand from her left!"

The rest of Horace's business was soon trans-



acted. To be sure, he sighed to think how quickly he had unbuild his home; but, according to the house-agent who managed the affair he had been most fortunate.

"It is not often a furnished house is wanted in East Bramley," said the man of business. "The gentleman has brought his wife to consult Dr. Manton. She is an invalid; and, after all, the air is very bracing, as I tell him, and the society good, and he might have come to a worse place."

Horace scarcely heard this remark. He was in a hurry to be gone, and he was wondering how best he should break the intelligence to Ruth. As he crossed the market-place he met Miss Easton. She was on foot, and had her card-case in her hand. She stopped at once, and addressed him with her usual cordiality.

"I have been making another attempt, and been unsuccessful," said she; "I am very sorry."

He knew what she meant. She had been calling on Ruth, and been again refused.

Some time ago such a thing would have vexed and wounded him; for he was certain that Ruth was at home. But he was like a man who only hopes to save his life from the wreck. This treasure and that must needs sink without an effort to regain them.

"I can not have what I wished for," he thought, as, after a few moments' conversation, he passed on; "pleasant converse with friends—domestic happiness. These things are drifting fast away. If I can steer clear of ruin—if I can save my honor from the wreck—this is all!"

His lips were compressed as he said it, and the expression of his face was that of a disappointed man. But the fact that once again Miss Easton's friendly overtures had been refused, appeared in the light of a trifle.

He did not reach his home till tea-time. He had had a great deal of business to go through, and on such hard-pressed days he would dine at his office. Ruth never seemed to mind about this in the least.

He thought she would have quite recovered—that the cloud would have passed, and he should see again the serene and smiling countenance which had promised so much happiness and content. But there was a quiet persistence about Ruth of which he little recked. The cloud was there just the same.

He was changed. He did not accost her tenderly, and soothe and caress her, as he might have done some little time ago. He was displeased, and words of affection did not come so readily. He was losing his respect for her character. It was as if there had been a slip of the foundations; the building had become less secure.

"The foolish woman plucketh down her house with her hands."

He came gravely and silently to the meal which should have been so social. She poured out his tea and pushed it towards him. Her want of courtesy seemed to widen the breach.

She had her book by her, and read it industriously. He thought she did it to provoke him; but he made no remark. By-and-by he would have his say, whether or no.

Is this the sweet gentle girl, his companion and his solace?

Is she not rude, ill-tempered, and unkind? Is not the match unequal? Will it not be a yoke to gall both of them?

But affection was not dead yet. It lingered, and, ere long, made itself heard. His heart relented as he looked at her, and thought again how young she was, and recalled her early training, and her total inexperience. And he thought of his last attempt to save the vessel from destruction, and hoped it would succeed, and that happy days might be in store even for them.

Thinking thus, he came and sat beside her. Tea was over, and she had placed herself on the sofa, her book in her hand.

His first overture of reconciliation was to put his arm round her. He wanted that there should be peace. He wanted her to be affectionate and loving, and the sharer of his plans for their mutual benefit. But, however he might feel, her heart was obdurate. She got up and moved to the table. Then resting her head on her hand, she continued reading, as for her life.

"Ruth, I am sorry you avoid me."

He said it gently, and as if he were still open to concession. She did not answer a word.

"I want to tell you the result of my day's work, Ruth, if you will listen."

This was said in firmer tones, and as if he were getting angry.

"I hear you," she replied, her eyes on her book.

"You must prepare to remove from here, Ruth. The house is taken."

He would have said it far more gently, if he had not been provoked. As it was, the words sounded harsh and abrupt.

She made a little movement, as though she were taken by surprise.

He added directly, for the man's heart was tender as a woman's—

"But you need not be uneasy, Ruth; I have provided a home that I am sure you will like, and where you will have no cares to worry you. I have taken the rooms that I spoke of, and we can go there directly."

The veins of her neck swelled. He could see this as he sat.

"It is like your mean ways, to bring me down to lodgings!"

"Ruth!"

Her choked voice and fierce look astonished him. He thought Ruth, his own Ruth, was gone, and this other creature come instead.

His anger rose in proportion to her insolence. He would not stay with her, and he took a lamp and went up stairs to the room overhead. Here he fetched his books, and prepared to pass the evening.

For a time his outraged feelings held him up. He preferred solitude to her company. He

would cease to be forbearing and indulgent. He would be harsh and inflexible, and teach her he was master. But this mood did not last—it could not, in such a breast as that of Horace Vincent's.

His anger began to die away. He was glad to think he had not answered her again. It was a comfort to reflect that no bitter words had heaped fuel on the fire. She would be sorry, he thought, to have him sit there alone. He fancied she would come stealing up to heal the breach. She must know that it was of her making. Hark! is not that her step? He is quite willing. His arms and heart are open. What he dreads most is domestic strife, and the continual dropping which wears away the stone.

Surely she will come. But no; that is not her step. She sits brooding below on her injuries. She is never likely to come. And presently she passes him on the stairs with averted face. And when he says, "Ruth," hoping by the magic of the name to break the spell, she does not answer. And he goes back to his solitude, and hears the night wind moan down the street, as though it might have been the echo of his departing hopes: for he knows himself to be one of those hapless beings whose earthly happiness has gone down a wreck.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A SEARCH IN AN OLD CHEST.

"LUKE—Luke! what are you about?" asked Kate, giving a series of sharp raps at the door of the lumber-room. "Don't you know that Juliet Masterman has been here?"

"I can't help it," replied Luke, opening the door and revealing himself, his sleeves turned up, his coat off; "I'm busy."

"What in the world are you doing?"

"Looking for a paper."

"I dare say I could help you, if you had condescended to tell me what you wanted," said Kate, stepping in.

"I hardly know myself," replied Luke in a puzzled tone. "It is clear there must be something."

"What kind of a something? And really now, just when I have put all those places tidy, and had the room cleaned!"

"Ah! that's it. One never is likely to keep any thing if that odious cleaning is to go on. It means turning every thing topsy-turvy. Of course—"

"I know where every thing is; and a comfort if all the Ormonds could say the same!" exclaimed Kate, snappishly. "What do you want, Luke?"

"A memorandum-book of our father's. It might contain some clue to this debt Mr. Sibley talks about."

"I dare say you have not looked in the right place. That chest is full of memorandum-books

and musty old papers. I had half a mind to burn them. They harbor nothing but dust and dirt."

"Just hunt about, Kate, will you? I've tired myself," said Luke, sitting contentedly down.

"That is like your laziness, Luke!" and she proceeded to search in the chest; "and if you go on in this lazy manner, you will lose Juliet altogether."

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes; and if you were not the most phlegmatic man that ever lived, you would have come and spoken to her this morning."

"I shall speak to her some of these days."

"Yes; when she has decided to marry somebody else."

"Kate! what a little vixen you are!"

"And here's your memorandum-book," continued Kate, getting up, her cheeks flushed and her fingers all over dust. "Now what would you do without me, I wonder!"

Luke took the book from her, and began to turn over the leaves in a quiet and leisurely manner.

"Give me the book. You are so slow, Luke, I haven't common patience!"

"Keep off, Kate! Here's a recipe for gooseberry wine. You had better copy it out."

"As if my gooseberry wine was not the best in the county!" said Kate, boastfully. "But is there nothing about the debt?"

"Stay, I have it! Do you see, Kate?" and he became, for him, quite excited. "Here is a page pinned in. This is the very thing I have been hunting for. This will put an end to the matter."

"Is it the receipt?" asked Kate, anxiously.

"No, not exactly; but it is something that comes very near it. It is a memorandum in my father's writing. Listen, Kate," and he began to read aloud. "I have made all square between myself and Sir Frederick Morton, touching that affair of ours. Out of debt, out of danger. I can this day call the farm my own. What can be more clear than that?"

"But where is the receipt?" repeated Kate.

"There was a receipt, for it is mentioned. See; my father says, 'I have filed the receipt, which—' I can't make out any more; the paper is gone at the corner, as if mice had been nibbling it."

"It is like the Ormonds," said Kate, bitterly, "to leave a document of such value to the rats and mice."

"Never mind. I shall just show this memorandum to Sir Frederick. He is being hounded on by Sibley. He suspects in his heart that the debt is paid."

Kate was silent.

"I shall go at once, now that Mr. Sibley is out of the way. Sir Frederick is a very reasonable man, if one can get him by himself."

Kate was still silent. It was provoking that there should be a flaw in the evidence, which made it of no legal value. But she would not slacken Luke's activity, now it was once roused.



She let him start off to the Tower without a word.

Sir Frederick was shut up in his private room, the apartment in which he transacted his business affairs. He sat at a table covered with papers, and had a pale and jaded look. All he desired, as he told Mr. Sibley, was to get his affairs on a better and more correct footing.

Luke came in joyfully. He was in the best possible spirits.

"Good-morning, Sir Frederick," said he, cheerily. "I have found the memorandum I wanted."

"What, about the debt?"

"Yes, about the debt;" and Luke drew the book from his pocket.

"I am sure I am very glad to hear it. Sit down, Mr. Ormond. You will take lunch with me. Allow me;" and, with the utmost politeness, he took Luke's hat and riding-whip from him. He was glad of the opportunity of showing him some civility.

"Thank you, I do not wish for any thing," said Luke, opening his memorandum-book. "Here it is, you see, written in black and white," and he unpinned the page, and gave it to Sir Frederick. "Can you have any doubt now that the debt is paid?"

Sir Frederick read over the few lines written on the page.

"Have you brought the receipt with you, Mr. Ormond?" he asked.

He knew that nothing short of the receipt would pacify Mr. Sibley. In his own mind he was convinced that the debt was paid. Many circumstances had led him to this opinion; not the least of these was the bitter hostility of Sibley to the Ormonds, and his evident desire to do them mischief. His better judgment told him it was a kind of persecution.

When Luke confessed that the receipt was not to be found, it did not alter his opinion. He knew the careless nature of both the parties concerned, and he was not so much surprised as might have been expected. Besides, he recognized the hand-writing of Luke's father, whose strict integrity he had never doubted. In fact, the memorandum was to him conclusive, and he began to congratulate Luke on having found it.

"You are satisfied, then?" said Luke.

"Oh, quite? I had no wish to proceed to extremities. I desire to live in peace with every one."

"And so do I," added Luke, hastily.

"Now, Mr. Ormond," resumed the baronet; "by-the-by, *do* take something, if it is only that we may eat salt together," and he smiled persuasively.

"Thank you, just a crust, that is all. I must be starting again directly."

"Mr. Ormond, you are still firm about not selling your farm?"

"Quite so. My dear father, when on his death-bed, charged me on no account to do so."

"Exactly. I was only thinking that perhaps Sibley— Well, that is no matter. Of course, I am the master," added Sir Frederick, with the air of a man who secretly is convinced that he will have to fight a battle.

Luke swallowed down his crust in haste. He wanted to be gone.

"All is settled straight now," thought he, as the old pony jogged leisurely along the road. "And a very nice young man the baronet is—very nice indeed. What a pity it is he's so weak, and lets that rascal Sibley have the upper hand of him!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WHAT SHOULD HE DO NOW?

"THE first of March, mother, when the spring comes in, and violet buds begin to open, then will be the happy day," said Sidney Peters, in a tone of exultation.

"Has she fixed the time, then?"

"Yes, mother."

"I am sure I am glad," said Lady Peters, as she settled her lace ruffles; "it is just the right thing for you to do. And then there is such a nice property—"

"Don't allude to that, mother, I beg," said Sidney, his face reddening. "If Miss Easton had not a farthing—"

"Now, Sidney, don't talk nonsense. You will be as bad as poor dear Frederick; and, by-the-way, a gentleman wishes to see you. He has been waiting the last half-hour in the library."

"Who is he?—where's his card?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I was very busy when he came, and he was put in there. I have so much to attend to. Of course, when every thing one puts on has to come from town—"

"It is one of my college chums, I should think," interrupted Sidney, musingly.

"Very likely. You had better ask him to dinner."

"Perhaps I had. At any rate, he has waited for me long enough;" and Sidney, humming a tune in the gayety of his heart, turned his steps towards the library.

He was in one of his sunniest moods. All seemed to be going right with him. Adela had fixed the date of his happiness. Herself, her fortune, would both be his. He would have no need to drudge at the law, or weary himself to get clients. Instead of this, he was about to seek the sunny skies of Italy, and wander with his beloved among the groves of orange and myrtle. Could any thing be more in unison with his nature?

Thinking this, and still humming some glad song, he opened the door. Then suddenly, and without a moment's preparation, he came into the presence of Reuben Howard.

He tried to recover himself. He was not a person to be run down speedily. He had

shifts, and doublings, and evasions without number. For if it were so, Reuben Howard could but come on one errand.

He had heard Amy speak of her brother Reuben, and with quick perception had sounded the danger of the girl's taking him into her confidence. What a coward thought it was which made him seal her lips from her only guardian and defender! Is he not ashamed? Does he not blush for his own baseness? No; not yet. He is casting over in his versatile mind how to escape from the dilemma. The future has never much hold on Sidney Peters. It is the present. If he can only get rid of the immediate embarrassment, trust him to find means of a complete riddance!

All this time he and his visitor are standing. Reuben, sternly weighing merit, and merit only, is scrutinizing the face which men, and women too, have thought so beautiful.

It has no charm for him. He sees through the gorgeous veil into the meagre heart beneath. The beauty he prizes is other than this. It is the ornament of a meek spirit; the grace of faith, and love, and purity. No matter in what homely frame the jewel be set, he esteems it beyond all price. Here, in this gaudy setting, is a worthless pebble!

Beneath this severe scrutiny, Sidney did not lose his self-possession; and in the bland and musical tones of a voice which rarely failed to captivate, he accosted his unwelcome guest, and begged him to be seated.

But Reuben remained standing. His voice was not musical, but harsh and rugged, as he inquired if the person he addressed was Sidney Peters.

Sidney colored with displeasure. "My friends are permitted to call me so," replied he, as if he would rebuke the rudeness of the speech.

"Pardon me; I have heard the name from the lips of my sister Amy."

Again comes the treacherous smile—the insidious courtesy intended to throw the other off his guard.

"I am really glad to make the acquaintance of one whom I have learned to esteem so highly. Pray be seated."

Reuben sat down; but the attitude he assumed was not conciliatory, nor were the other's blandishments of the slightest avail.

"On whatever business you are come," resumed Sidney, with seeming ingenuousness, "is there any reason why we should not shake hands before we enter upon it, especially as I perceive you are a clergyman?" and he held out his hand.

Reuben did not take it.

"Sir," replied he, gravely, and with sternness, "I see in you the man who has won my sister's love, and has promised to make her your wife. I leave you to guess how far your conduct towards her has been worthy of my respect."

"On my word, you deal hardly with me, Mr. Howard. Judge now between us. Your sister was here in a very useful capacity. I need not

name it, out of deference to your feelings—and here am I. Look at me! Do you think the match would conduce to our mutual happiness? Do you think that Lady Peters would open her arms to a daughter chosen from her own establishment?"

This was the man who once had told her that a clergyman stood in the same rank as a baronet.

Reuben's face was white and rigid. The words stung him, though he would not allow it.

He said that his errand was simply this: Amy had refused to forget her lover. He had endeavored, but vainly, to induce her to do so. She was drooping and ill with mental distress, and the sick yearning after Sidney. She had come to reside with him, being unfitted for her usual employments. His home, such as it was, was the only shelter she had. She was quite welcome. He would fain comfort her if he could, and build her up into a useful character; but this attachment was undoing her. Why should he see her die? Was it not Sidney's duty, plainly and palpably, to fulfill his promise and marry her? Was he not in duty bound?

There was a solemnity about the manner of Reuben Howard, and a resolute determination, that set all trifling aside. Sidney glanced downward at the abyss on the borders of which he stood.

The marriage would ruin him as far as the world went, and rend away his fairest hopes. Besides, his heart—so he termed the bauble—was now possessed by Adela. Should he make a clean breast and say so? He did not think he dare. He was in the power of an iron will that, he felt convinced, nothing could induce to bend. Besides, there was his mother. The drops actually stood on his forehead from the dread lest she should make her appearance. How if Reuben appealed to her? How if he carried the matter to Miss Easton? There is no knowing what might not be the result of this interview.

Any thing would be more politic than downright opposition. He must throw the enemy off the scent. He must take to doubling.

"He was very sorry," he began; "indeed, his conscience was roused by what Mr. Howard had said. He had no wish to inflict ill on one he had tenderly loved. He thought Amy had forgotten him. He was willing to take any step that Mr. Howard could suggest."

The liquid tenderness of his eye, the feeling expression of his face, might have misled the veriest skeptic. Even Reuben, for the moment, was off his guard.

"What would you have me do?" repeated Sidney. And in spite of himself, the musical sweetness of his voice penetrated the reluctant ears of the other. "I am willing to adopt any course."

"Then will you intrust me with a message? May I hear from your own lips that you will visit my sister as her affianced husband? That you will redeem your pledge, and heal the wound you have inflicted. May I?"

Sidney was on his strictest guard. He tried to force back the color to a cheek which Reuben's proposition had left bloodless. Between himself and ruin there was but a single step!

But on that step would hang deliverance. Was he not subtle, adroit, and swift?

With an unfaltering voice he sent the message. He would come. Amy might expect him. The pledge might be redeemed; the wound healed.

Was it possible to doubt the sincerity of his words? Was it possible that even the rugged spirit of Reuben Howard should, to the end, withstand the fair words, the promises, the blandishments, of an adept like Sidney Peters?

He did not withstand them. He went on his way, gladdened by the good tidings which he bore.

And what did Sidney say?

"My only safety now is in a speedy marriage with Miss Easton. The first of March will be too late!"

### CHAPTER XXXI.

"IT IS EASY TO DECEIVE A WOMAN."

"SHE seems ailing a little. She frets after her aunt. Happen when all this is over, and we've got quieter, she may be better."

The staid old nurse, a privileged person, who had known Adela from her cradle, made this remark. Adela had come to pay a visit to her niece. Her time had been much occupied of late. The full, flowing tide had borne her on with an impetuosity that made her wonder. She had little space to devote to Ethel, in these days. In a fortnight—imagine how near it was!—in a fortnight, she had promised to become the wife of Sidney Peters. He had urged on the marriage and prevailed. She was in a state of great bliss. She loved to sit alone and think of Sidney; that is, when Sidney was not present. And most of his time was spent at the Hall.

She was expecting Sidney that morning, and when she had caressed the child, and her visit had extended its usual length, she strolled out to meet him. She was in the habit of doing so.

It was a balmy morning in the early spring. Violets gave out perfume, and the spring flowers gladdened every sheltered nook and corner.

What springs, what summers, what golden autumns would be hers now! The whole year one gush of gladness!

Look at her as she walks along in all the fullness of her youth and beauty. She has reached the very height of her felicity. Is it not too bright to last? Is there not a point where the tide may turn?

She strolled into a sheltered walk, where thick evergreens made a wall on either side. It was called the "Lovers' Walk," a name which had often made her smile incredulously.

Half-down there was a rustic arbor,

which in summer-time would be crowned with roses and woodbine. Even now pale buds were pushing forth rapidly. The spot was so screened that even in winter she can sometimes sit there. In this jubilant period she was wont to wait there for Sidney.

She wonders he is not come, and while she wonders she hears voices and footsteps on the gravel road which leads to the house.

A voice speaks, as it were, into her ear. It is the voice of Sidney Peters.

She had no time to stir or to utter a sound.

The words fell upon her with the suddenness of an avalanche, or of the swift, cleaving lightning.

"Of course, I shall get rid of the child."

There is a laugh. Could it be Sidney's? No; it was his mother who laughed.

"It is so easy to deceive a woman. Only let me get married!"

Again his mother laughed, and the two passed on. The jeering voice of Sidney and the mocking laugh of his mother were heard a few moments longer—then all was silent.

Could she have heard aright? She did not leave the spot where she stood until a sick faint shivering came over her. Then, slowly and with difficulty, she retraced her steps to the house.

She went to her room as to a refuge where at least she might be alone. She had a sensation of physical illness—a bruised, aching sensation—a dull pain at her heart and in her brain. It was a slippery height from which she had fallen, and she lay crushed and half dead.

She knew they would send for her—the two visitors whom she had heard talking. Could she go to them; meet Sidney's smile, and hear his mother's platitudes?

They must go away: and plot, and jeer, and mock, and say it was easy to deceive a woman!

After a time they went away. The servant who had brought the message came back to say that they were gone. And then Adela closed her door on the outer world, and lay down again.

She did not move or stir. She lay silent and motionless, as though she had been turned to stone. It was as if the frost had laid hold of some gushing rill, and left it as hard as iron.

She knew that if tears came they might relieve her. Tears were what she wanted; but her eyes were dry at present.

All at once, through the open window, came the soft piping of the blackbird and the thrush. She had heard the same notes yesterday, when strolling in the garden with Sidney. He had stopped to listen, and had said to her, in his flowery manner, that the spring was come, and the singing of birds was heard in the land. She remembered his voice and his look as vividly as if he were before her. Between now and yesterday what a dismal gulf was fixed!

The rent in her happiness—the rock on which it had split, was not so much the threat of separation from her niece. She was in duty bound not to allow the separation. She had pledged

herself solemnly, and she would redeem the pledge. The stunning blow came from the words which Sidney had used.

"It is so easy to deceive a woman!"

The veil, alluring as it was, had been rent away. The golden halo dispersed. He was not the man she had supposed. He was not to

glad river with its sunny banks? To a union with one who would speedily take off the mask; who would appear in his real character; who would jeer, and mock, and tell her it had been "easy to deceive a woman."

There was a truthfulness in Adela's nature, which made her intolerant of deceit and treach-



"IT IS SO EASY TO DECEIVE A WOMAN."

be trusted. He said one thing, but he meant another.

Out of his own mouth had come the confession, that he was about to deceive her. And she had fancied him as true as steel!

Where had she been floating to—down this

ery. And if such were his sentiments, he had uttered falsehoods without number.

Oh, it had been too bright and garish—this golden future! Its colors had died out, like the tints in the western sky!

She knew that it was over between herself

and Sidney. She knew it, as she lay there, hour after hour, all through that fair spring day, when Nature was revelling in sweet sounds and newly awakening perfumes; when insects hummed, and birds carolled, and buds unfolded; when all living creatures rejoiced save one—one to whom it seemed as if no spring would ever come again!

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE LITTLE LEAK WHICH SINKS THE SHIP.

"I MUST say I feel uneasy, Sidney; it was such a sudden illness, and to refuse to see either of us was a bad sign. Besides, she looked the picture of health yesterday."

"I can not help it, mother. Women are full of caprices," said Sidney, moodily.

"You are going to the Hall now, at all events?" said Lady Peters, anxiously.

"Yes; she may be better this morning."

He did not look quite himself. His face had a careworn expression, different to its usual jaunty air. He had a letter from Amy in his pocket; not that he had opened it.

He knew well enough where the letter came from; and he was affected for the moment by the deep black edge of the envelope, which told him that Amy was an orphan.

Should he throw it into the fire? What was the use of harboring such a reminder?

"Sidney," said the few blotted lines inside the letter—"Sidney, how was it that you never came? I am ill; you would hardly know me to be the same Amy, and I have no home but with Reuben. He told me you were coming. He chides me, Sydney, because I don't get well, and because I can not turn my thoughts to other subjects. And my heart leaped with such joy at the hope of seeing you once more—my love! my love!

"I sat watching all the day. At first, I felt so bright and happy. But I grew weary and heart-sick when night came and you had not been. And the next day I watched. Sidney, I keep watching every day; and my life is wearing out, and my heart is breaking. Come, Sidney, come!—my love! my love!"

This was the letter, which Sidney had not even opened.

He rode over to Bramley Hall betimes. There was a misgiving in his mind which he tried to put down. What was there to be afraid of?—a slight illness, that was all. It would soon pass by, and he cantered merrily onward.

Perhaps she would meet him at the gate, or in the walk, or at the summer-house. What a glorious morning! She would be sure to come.

He left his horse with a groom, and went to look for her in the usual haunts. She was not in any of them. The summer-house was empty and deserted.

He was afraid she was really ill, and that the matter was serious. He hurried to the house

to inquire. Yes, she had been ill, but she was better. She was in the breakfast-room as usual.

Oh! it was all right, and he stepped briskly forward. Things would go on just the same. He should have the same pleasant morning, the music, the reading, the lovers' talk. He could do the latter to perfection. What was the matter? Why was she sitting listless and unoccupied, her hands folded, her face rigid? Where was the smile, the glad look, the ardent welcome he had never missed before?

Could this pale-stricken woman be the brilliant Adela of yesterday? He seemed to have met with a blank!

She had debated with herself, all through the weary night, whether she should see him again; whether she should not flee away into some deep retirement whither his seductive voice could not reach her. But her heart fought desperately for this last interview. Once, and no more!

It was not so easy as he had fancied to deceive a woman!

She explained the matter to him. She thought it was but fair and just. She repeated the words which had made shipwreck of her happiness. The sentences were brief and soon said. But it is the little leak which sinks the ship!

He laughed—not the mocking laugh which still rang in her ears. No; a clear, joyous, musical laugh—his own laugh.

Was that all? Oh! it was so delicious to get up a lovers' quarrel, for the sake of being reconciled. Come, let that pass! Kiss and be friends!

She was indignant at his levity; it nerved her to greater firmness. What before had been a faint glimmer, was now clear as daylight. He was alarmed at her looks. He thought he had gone too far.

"Adela, my love, my dearest, my wife that will be!"

And with all the old blandishments, he sought to take her to his heart, and make his peace.

His syren voice, his honeyed smile, the fascination of his eye, told upon her. Her heart thrilled as only he could make it. Every impulse was drawn as by magic power to him—him only!

He saw his advantage, and, he added, eagerly, "Give up the child, Adela, and come to me. What is its puny love to mine—mine, that will cherish and abide by you while life lasts? Think of my love, dearest!" and again he sought to approach her.

But she would not. The ordeal was beyond her strength. She had never loved him more vehemently than now. Her soul went forth to him as to its rest—its home.

But she knew the rest would be deceptive. It had no element of security about it. Pleasure, with white hand, beckoned; Duty sternly forbade.

Was she not in duty bound?

She was not the woman to make a scene. There was little romance or sensationalism in Adela's nature. She was simple-minded, prompt,



and firm. And she meant to abide by her sister's child.

She told him so. She had made a mistake, she said, and there was a stifled sigh, and a yearning wistful look in her eyes. But it was not too late. Sorrow had better come now than

yet to be practised. He was a man of resource, and it was not likely he should be baffled, after all.

She left the room. She felt it was impossible to prolong the interview. No matter; let her go for the present. It has been an unfor-



"GIVE UP THE CHILD, ADELA, AND COME TO ME."

later. The calm conviction of her mind was that the marriage must be set aside.

Her manner was so decided that for the moment he could not answer her.

He was conscience-stricken, and his usual fluency seemed to have forsaken him; not that he gave her up. Oh, no! There were many arts

tunate circumstance—an act of imprudence that he wonders at himself for committing. In one more week he would have been safe. His heart is very callous; there is no relenting in it. He had meant to get rid of the child—to cast it off like a stray leaf, that the waters carry to forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

"LUKE! LUKE! MY BROTHER LUKE!"

"Slow but sure wins the day in the end," ruminated Luke Ormond, as he sat on the low sunny wall which divided one part of the garden from the other, and which in fine weather was a favorite lounging-place. "I am glad I screwed up my courage yesterday. Because, now Sir Frederick has said he is satisfied, it is quite time to bestir myself. And I will have the house papered from the top to the bottom, and a new piano in the drawing-room. It is more than time that old instrument, which Kate has strummed on ever since I can remember, should be chopped up for fire-wood. A quiet easy life I mean to have of it now—that is, if Juliet won't always be dragging me to parties. Bless her pretty face, I don't care what she does with me!"

"Here, Kate—Kate!"

This was addressed to his sister, who was busy sowing flower-seeds in the beds on the lawn.

"Well?"

"Just come here, Kate, will you?"

"As if I was likely?" replied she, sharply, "when it's as much as ever I shall do—"

"But I have something to tell you, Kate; a piece of news."

"Oh!"

She hesitated a moment, the packet of flower-seeds in her hand. She had a great mind not to go, but female curiosity was strong in Kate. After a little further parley with herself, she stepped across to the wall.

"Won't you sit down, Kate? there's plenty of room."

"No, thank you; I am not so fond of sitting as you are."

"Every one to his taste, my dear; it is not half a bad place here. I can look on so nicely and see you work."

She made an impatient movement as if she would go back, but he stopped her by saying, "Kate, now this tiresome business is over, I am thinking of getting married."

"Is that all? You have thought about it this long time," replied Kate, unbelievably.

"Ah, but I mean to—that is to say, I have—"

"Made Juliet an offer?" suggested Kate, still incredulously.

"Yes, Kate, I have."

"Bravo, Luke!" And she clapped her hands. "But is it really true?"

"Really true."

"And has she accepted you?"

"Yes."

Kate stood and looked at him a few minutes. Her face showed more signs of emotion than it usually exhibited. At length she went up to him, and kissed him affectionately.

"Bless you, my darling! I hope you may be very happy."

"Thank you," replied Luke, stolidly, and settling his collar, which Kate ruffled in the ardor of her embrace.

"And just look here, Kate. I'm not a man with a flow of words, as you know, but this I say from my heart. The home is yours, dear, as long as you like to stay in it, and the longer the better for me."

"You are very good, Luke."

"That is what I wanted to tell you, and now get back to your flower-beds as soon as you like."

A few soft womanly tears fell from Kate's eyes as she walked away. She was deeply attached to her brother, and the thought of his marriage had affected her greatly. She was almost inclined, for once, to be sentimental; but sentiment had little part in the practical nature of Kate Ormond. Besides, what a wide scope she was about to enjoy; the whole house must be got ready for the bride. There would be papering, and painting, and cleaning to her heart's content. Kate would be in her element.

This excited state of things set in almost directly. Luke's approaching marriage with Juliet Masterman, and the preparations which were being made, became the staple topic of conversation in the neighborhood.

Luke himself was happily too much engrossed in his courtship, and too often absent, to care for the wild raid that was being made into every part of his home.

The after-effect, Kate told him, would be a success; and people, she added, were not married every day—that is, the same people.

But as all things have their end, so had Kate's labors. The house was at length quite ready to receive the bride.

Kate was standing surveying the new paper just hung on the walls of the drawing-room, when in came Peggy.

"If you please, miss, you're wanted."

"Who wants me Peggy? I'm engaged to every one just now."

"It's him as come before—Mr. Sibley."

Kate turned round in the faint hope that she had not heard right.

"Who is it, Peggy?"

"Him as I let through the kitchen—Sir Frederick's agent, they call him; he wants to see master."

Kate was taking off the white apron she had tied before her for purposes of cleanliness, and was rolling it up.

"I told him master was out, and he said he must see you."

"Ah!" thought Kate, her heart beating strangely, "there's mischief, I know—mischief. I am coming, Peggy," added she, a moment after.

Mr. Sibley was in the room into which he had been ushered on his last visit. It wore a new face now, it had been re-papered and re-furnished; Mr. Sibley was taking a note of this when Kate entered.

"Dear me!" he began with his usual fawning manner, "so we have been making improvements, and buying new furniture! Well, I am sure! I congratulate Mr. Ormond on his

approaching wedding. I suppose it is to take place immediately?"

Kate was silent. Beyond the barest toleration she could not go, and nothing should force her into a friendly chat with Mr. Sibley.

"If I were your brother, I would get the other business settled first," continued the agent, with a look of malicious triumph.

"What business, sir?"

"He had far better pay the money than be sued for it."

"If you allude to the debt once contracted by my dear father, and repaid by him, that matter is settled. I advise you to ask Sir Frederick."

She spoke bravely, but her heart failed her all the time. She knew how dangerous this man was, and what a weapon he handled.

"My dear young lady, you don't suppose that silly scrap of paper produced by your brother would stand good in law? Where is the receipt, Miss Ormond—the receipt, madam, attested by the name of the late lamented Sir Frederick Morton? Then, indeed, the paper might be valid."

Kate was silent for an instant—baffled. She knew any kind of appeal to Mr. Sibley would be fruitless and humiliating; but she said, quite collectedly, a moment after, "You had better discuss the matter with my brother, I expect him home directly."

"There is no occasion, I only came to warn you."

"Warn us of what?" asked Kate, her heart sickening with a vague alarm.

"That Sir Frederick, who holds the clear, straight-forward record of the debt, and can produce a witness, intends to sue for payment, and at once."

"This is your doing, Mr. Sibley," thought Kate—"yours."

But she did not say so. She would not make matters worse by that sharp weapon—a woman's tongue; and she knew if the slightest opening were made, on would rush a torrent, like the letting out of a river.

What a life-long grudge Mr. Sibley owed them! It had its existence before Kate was born. She did not know clearly its origin; but how persistent it was, and how cruel! and what would be the end of it?

When she was alone, she could control herself no longer; she gave a sharp little cry.

"Oh, Luke! Luke! my brother Luke!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT.

SHE had scarce time to wipe away her tears when a slow, leisurely step came plodding by the window. Then there stopped and looked in, with a face beaming with happiness, Luke Ormond.

He had stopped the minute he caught sight of Kate.

"Well, Kate, and how does the work go on? will it soon be done?"

"Yes," replied Kate, with unusual meekness.

"I like the paper in the drawing-room very much indeed. I just gave a glance in. The carpet is a first-rate match, isn't it, Kate?"

"Yes," again she replied, in the same subdued tone.

"Kate, you are knocking yourself up. I am so sorry! Sit down, my dear. I want to tell you, Juliet and I think you are so very good to take all this trouble."

"I don't think it a trouble, Luke."

And she stooped down, apparently to pick something from the floor, but in reality to hide her tears.

"I saw that fellow Sibley, in the distance, as I came home," resumed Luke; "thank goodness, he can not come here any more."

Kate was silent.

"It was just the right thing to do—to hold my peace until that matter was settled. I never could and never would involve the woman that I loved in all the misery of suspense and anxiety. The old man—her grandfather—says that he should not have given his consent," added Luke, who had made a seat for himself on the window-sill, and was evidently drawn out of his taciturnity; "and he was in the right of it."

"I think he was, dear."

"But now all is straight sailing, which just suits me. Pray, how long, Kate, does it take a young lady to get her wedding-bonnet made?"

Kate gave a forced little laugh. She was very unhappy indeed. She felt that all would go wrong from the beginning to the end—that Luke's bright speculations were delusive as a dream.

How should she tell him? Yet she must do so, and the sooner the better.

"Luke," she began in a faltering voice—

"Luke, dear, I am sorry to interrupt you, but Mr. Sibley has been."

"What! here? to this house?"

And Luke started up in great wrath.

"Yes, Luke; to this house."

"I wish I had caught him about the premises, the sneaking rascal! I would have given him such a dressing! What did he come for?" asked Luke, breaking off abruptly.

"About that odious debt, dear. You know what I mean."

"But there is an end of that!" cried Luke, eagerly. "Sir Frederick said he was quite satisfied—quite!"

"Luke," said Kate, with anxiety, "did Sir Frederick, when he said he was satisfied, destroy the letter which relates to the debt, or is it still in existence?"

"I don't know about that. He said words to the effect that he would. I should think he has destroyed it."

"Because all turns on that, Luke; and I am afraid how it has been: Mr. Sibley has prevent-



ed him. You know how weak Sir Frederick is; and now the mischief is opened up again, and we are in their power."

Luke's face was the picture of blank dismay. As for Kate, she burst into tears.

"Kate, if you give up, all is lost!" cried Luke, in a tone of alarm. "Dear Kate, don't lose heart of the matter, or what will become of us?"

"I don't give up," said Kate, drying her eyes. "I will think over all possible ways and means. I will leave no stone unturned. But, Luke, I am so sorry—so very sorry—for you." and she almost broke down again.

"My dear, I am just as sorry for you," replied Luke, simply; "it will fall on both of us alike."

"I can't think that it *will* fall," cried Kate, recovering her ancient energy. "I know what step I will take first. I will appeal to Sir Frederick myself."

"You, Kate?—you?"

"Yes; why not? I am not in the least afraid of him; and I know my cause is just. I am convinced the debt is paid. Did not my dear father say so on his death-bed?"

"But in strict law, my dear—"

"Never mind about strict law. Sir Frederick would never have thought of such a thing if he had not been driven by Mr. Sibley. It is Mr. Sibley who is bent on our destruction. I shall tell Sir Frederick so."

"Kate," said Luke, regarding her with admiration, "you might do worse. I am quite of opinion that if any one could influence Sir Frederick, you could. You are a very clever little woman, my sister."

He was quite cheerful again for the moment. A few seconds ago he was thinking of breaking off with Juliet, and rushing away to Australia! There had been no bounds to his disappointment and despair.

But he had a vast reliance on Kate's tactics.

"When shall you go?" he asked, with anxiety.

"Directly. There is no time like the present, and Mr. Sibley is gone home. I watched the direction he took. He will not be at the Hall for the next few hours."

"Come, then! off with you!" said Luke, in his usual manner.

Another time she would have given one of her sharp little retorts. She would have said, "Of course, I must do every thing. Every thing depends on *me*!"

But her mood was subdued, and almost gentle. Trouble had softened her. She went away without a word.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### HIS MASTER COME BACK.

SIR FREDERICK was again shut up in his private apartment at the Tower. He lived in a state of seclusion, partly from choice, partly from necessity. The house seemed to belong more

to the Peters family than to himself. He knew how it would be when he admitted them, but he had not the strength of mind to resist their encroachments. Lady Peters was his aunt, and, carry it off as she might, was in needy circumstances. He could hardly refuse to offer her a home. Sidney followed as a natural appendage. It was like them both to assume the reins, and drive recklessly over him. Like them to lay their plans, and follow their pleasure, without the least reference to himself. Sir Frederick felt the neglect keenly; his heart yearned for sympathy, but, except in Mr. Sibley, he found it not. Perhaps he fell back on Mr. Sibley's companionship, in default of any other. Certain it is, Mr. Sibley had obtained a great influence and domination over him. He dreaded now to think what Mr. Sibley would say to him about this affair of the memorandum. While the agent was absent, Sir Frederick could be bold. He felt resolved to maintain his point. Miss Ormond should hear no more of the matter. He would tell Sibley that he had settled it once and forever, and then Sibley might think what he chose. No one could force him into an act of injustice against his will.

In less than half an hour there was the usual modest tap at the door. In walked Mr. Sibley. He had returned from his journey sooner than his patron expected; and, for once, Sir Frederick scarcely knew whether this fact was quite agreeable to him. He had begun to enjoy the sweets of liberty, and here was his master back again.

"Well," said the agent, with a keen glance at the papers that lay on the table, and among which Luke Ormond's card was conspicuous—"well, so you have had a visitor, I perceive."

"Yes," replied the baronet, uneasily; "yes. I say, Sibley, about those rents—"

"Never mind the rents now, my dear patron, we can discuss them another time. Pray what was the purport of Mr. Ormond's visit—was it to enjoy the pleasure of our society?"

The mocking tone stung Sir Frederick into opposition.

"He and I have settled that tiresome matter of the debt, Sibley. He has found a paper which sets it at rest forever."

"A *bonâ fide* receipt?"

"Not exactly," and Sir Frederick became embarrassed. "Oh no—not a receipt, but a memorandum, which satisfies one quite as well; and if I am satisfied, you know, there is an end of the business."

"Will you have the goodness to describe to me that paper?"

There was no escaping from that keen, steady eye, and that inflexible resolve not to pass over the matter. Sir Frederick sighed, in the perplexity of his spirit.

"Well," said Mr. Sibley, when he had heard all the particulars, "well?"

"Well, of course, that was quite satisfactory," replied the poor baronet, feebly attempting to maintain his ground.

"You told him so?"

"I did; I *was* satisfied, you know."

"Did you write your sentiments in black and white, or was the whole transaction verbal?"

"Oh, it was verbal."

A crafty smile played over the lips of the agent.

"My dear sir, it is well for you that you have an honest fellow like me to look after your interests. I don't know any living being who would be so fleeced."

"How fleeced?" exclaimed Sir Frederick, angrily.

"And made the laughing-stock of the county. No, my dear sir, I can never allow that while my name is Sibley!" and he rose.

"Where are you going?" asked Sir Frederick, alarmed.

"To see into the thing at once. Why, I can produce a witness. Did not I take the trouble of hunting him up? Has not that been the object and gist of my visit? Pardon me, this loose transaction between yourself and Luke Ormond is mere fool's work!"

There was something about Mr. Sibley's manner which had the power of cowing the poor baronet into submission, in spite of himself. He felt a mere tool in the hands of his agent. It was the influence of a strong and crafty mind over a weak but ingenuous one.

He began a rather incoherent speech, intended to uphold his authority, but Mr. Sibley cut him short.

"Either I am to be in your interests, Sir Frederick, and carry the matter through, or I retire. I will not stand by and see the estate absolutely robbed. Which am I to do?"

"Oh, for pity's sake, Sibley, don't talk of retiring!" cried the poor young man, catching at the stronger hand on which for so long he had leaned. "Of course, if you are resolved—"

"To be a faithful servant," suggested Mr. Sibley, with a half-smile.

"You must do as you please; only I am so grieved. I shall have broken my word with Mr. Ormond. I wish to my heart—I would rather lose the money, on my word!" and he walked up and down the room in the perplexity of his mind.

Mr. Sibley left him still walking up and down. He was used to carry things with a high hand. It mattered little to him what Sir Frederick suffered, so that he had his revenge.

Sir Frederick did suffer. He wandered about the room; he could not settle to any thing. He was now resolved one way—now another. He even thought at one time of actually letting Mr. Sibley go.

In the midst of these perplexities, and when Mr. Sibley had been gone about a couple of hours, there was a tap at the door. Could it be Mr. Sibley come back again?

No; a young lady wished to speak to Sir Frederick. She had declined to give her name.

Who in the world could she be? Well, at all events, admit her. Sir Frederick was the pink

of politeness. On no account would he keep a lady standing in the anteroom.

A small piquante person, exceedingly well dressed, and with an air of promptness and decision that made itself felt from the very beginning, walked briskly into the room.

Sir Frederick did not know who she was in the least, but he bowed politely, and offered her a chair.

"Thank you," replied the stranger, sitting down with the utmost self-possession and coolness. "I am Kate Ormond."

He started a little. Yet he might have remembered her, he thought. He had seen her at church, and at a distance. He had no idea how pretty she was. The clear decided tones of her voice were quite refreshing to him, in all the agonies of his indecision.

"I am Kate Ormond," continued she, fixing her sharp, bright eyes upon him, "and I wish to have a little conversation on the subject of the debt."

The debt! It was becoming quite a household word.

He was exceedingly polite. He said he should be very happy; any questions Miss Ormond liked to ask him, he would answer.

"Because," continued Kate, still looking at him, "the whole case lies in a nutshell. It is not a case of right or wrong, Sir Frederick, but of simple revenge, and the desire to do us mischief."

This was just what he had been thinking. How boldly and forcibly she put it! She was a decided character, evidently. He liked her for it.

"You know, in your heart, Sir Frederick, that the debt was paid."

How penetrating were the eyes! and how brilliant! He began to think her very handsome. He wished he were half as decided as she was.

"We Ormonds are rather a careless race," she continued; "but we are honest as the day. No Ormond yet could die in peace, and leave his children with a debt like that! My poor father did not. You have seen his own handwriting."

Her manner softened as she spoke of her father. The eyes were now very beautiful indeed.

He liked her to talk to him. It was not often he was appealed to by any body. He was a lonely neglected man, in spite of his position and his title. And his heart went with the Ormonds, and against Sibley.

"I am sure I am very sorry," he began. "I am satisfied myself that the debt is paid; and if—"

"If you are satisfied, Sir Frederick, our troubles will be over—the ruin which threatens us need not come. It is only yourself who can save us from it."

"If—if," stammered Sir Frederick; "if only—but I will talk to Sibley. I will—"

Kate Ormond rose in all her dignity.

"Sir Frederick, this matter is between ourselves and yourself. I dispute the right of Mr. Sibley to interfere. I beg that his name may not be mentioned."

Ah; it was well to talk! He wished he had such an energetic little person to back him up—against Sibley. He was plunged again into all the horrors of an internal war.

"Pray sit down, Miss Ormond. I have not the slightest objection to discuss the point," he said, in a conciliatory tone.

"And you will act on your own impartial judgment?"

"I will try to do so," he replied, rather flattered by the suggestion.

"Then allow me to ask," said Kate, resuming her seat, "on what paper, or document, or letter, does this business depend? I mean as far as regards yourself. Where is it stated that the debt is unpaid?"

"It is nowhere expressly stated so, Miss Ormond. Indeed, the whole matter is of a very unsatisfactory character. All the evidence I can produce is in a letter," and he took a letter from his desk.

"Will you allow me to see it?"

"I have not the least objection." And he gave a hurried glance to the door. "This is the sentence, Miss Ormond. My father wrote this letter. He merely refers to the fact. The absence of evidence on your side as to the payment is what perplexed me."

"You forget my dear father's declaration," said Kate, proudly.

"Ah, true! One should be set against the other, I think. I am quite as much convinced as you are."

"Well, then, let me beg you to act with decision. Decision is like a sharp weapon, which will cut a path through any difficulty."

"What would you have me do?" asked Sir Frederick.

"Accept my father's memorandum in lieu of a receipt, and destroy that letter."

What? How easily she said it! How simple the solution! He would gladly cut the knot, if it were not for Sibley.

His irresolute hand trifled with the letter.

"On that letter," resumed Kate earnestly and with feeling, "it seems to me as if our fate were suspended. We can not pay the debt a second time without becoming beggared. Added to which, we should by doing so accept disgrace and brand ourselves as untrue. A name fair and untarnished would be sullied forever."

The irresolute hand still trifled. Every word she said sunk into his heart. Her earnestness, the position in which she stood, invested her with a deep interest. He did not doubt her; how could he, with those clear truthful eyes in which was no guile? But Sibley—

"If it be so," said Kate, rising, "I can not but feel regret. Wrong does sometimes get the mastery over right; but you will suffer most, since on your conscience will be the ruin of the innocent."

He held the paper over the fire. The impulse to burn it was irresistible. It was on his conscience now; what would it be then?

He would like to save this girl from ruin. Would she look kindly at him? Would she remember him with gratitude? Would he be, in her eyes, a benefactor? He was attracted to her simply because she possessed the very characteristic which he most lacked. The more he thought of her, the more resolved he became. There was no end to the other difficulty. Could he bear those bright eyes to be dimmed with tears, that happy home uprooted? If a battle must be fought, let him fight it with Sibley.

"See, Miss Ormond," he said, gently and soothingly, "see what I am doing."

In another moment a bright blaze sprang up in the grate. The letter was destroyed.

When he looked at her again, she had burst into tears.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### REUBEN'S VISIT TO THE HOSPITAL.

"You will be getting weary of me, Reuben. I almost wish I might die."

"I am sorry you have so little fortitude, Amy," said her brother, reproachfully, and looking up from the volume he was studying.

"Fortitude! Oh yes; it is well to talk!" cried the girl, impatiently. "And here is your little tract—I haven't read it, I could not fix my attention on it a single instant. Here it is."

He took up the crumpled, dog-eared tract, which she flung from behind her as she lay on the sofa, and spread it out carefully, and corrected its dog-ears as well as he could. Then he rose and put it into its proper place in his bookcase. He was the soul of order; it went to his heart to have his books ill-used.

"I keep on thinking, now, that he will come, Reuben! It is of no use shaking your head, I can not—can not give him up!" and her lip quivered painfully.

"Amy, until you have dismissed this very foolish belief, I hardly know what is to be done."

"There are a hundred things which might prevent him. And he might be angry with me; or my letter might have missed him. Reuben"—and she started up eagerly—"do let me write again. Just one little line, and then if he does not answer, I will be quite patient and give him up, I will indeed."

Her whole face flushed into excitement as she spoke.

"With my consent, Amy, you shall never write again."

She threw herself back on the sofa with a bitter sigh.

"Let me read to you, Amy," he said.

These scenes, often repeated, tried and perplexed him sorely.

"I can not listen to your books, Reuben ;

they are too dry by half; they would weary me to death."

"My books are the sources of my greatest comfort," he replied, gently.

"Oh yes, I know. You are too good by half, Reuben. You ought never to have been saddled with such a sister as I am. Alas! alas!"

"If you steadily resolved to master this attachment, Amy, and put an end to those regrets, you might recover, and be your own dear self again. Think of the old days, when we had so much to suffer."

"I never knew what suffering was till now!" she said, wildly, "now that I have lost Sidney!"

He did not offer a reply to this frantic speech. He closed his book and got up as if to go.

"Where are you going, Reuben?"

"To the hospital, dear."

"Oh, I forgot. I am getting very selfish," and she burst into tears. "You had only that little hour in the whole day to be at peace, and read your precious book; and I have made it quite a misery. You will begin to hate me."

He went up to her, and laid his hand on her poor aching head. It was beyond his power to comfort her, and he said no more. He went out upon his mission of mercy.

He had never loved—he thought so, as he walked along. There had been no space in his life, crowded as it had been with the interests of others. Yet his heart was large, and full of human sympathy. He had no respect for a love like that of Sidney Peters. It was neither pure, nor faithful, nor courageous. It was a love that blights, but does not bless.

What should he do with Amy? It was a question that blended itself with his ministerial thoughts and cares. He tried to dismiss it for the present. If he could have prevailed upon her to visit the abodes of suffering, he fancied the effect would have been good and wholesome. But it was too late now; her own sorrow had laid her prostrate; "and the sorrow of the world," thought Reuben, "worketh death."

A nurse came to meet him, in the entrance-hall of the hospital.

"I am so glad you are come, sir! We had such a sad case brought in last night."

No new thing this; and again he thought of Amy.

"Yes, sir," continued the nurse, as she followed him along the corridor and up the stairs; "they found her stretched on the pavement in the cold and wet. They hardly knew, at first, whether she was alive or dead."

"A woman, then! God help her!" murmured Reuben, as if to himself.

"We can't make out who she is, sir. By the poor little bit of a cap inside her bonnet, we suppose she is a widow."

"Was she ill, or starving, or what?" asked Reuben, his mind supplying a few suggestions.

"Oh, both, sir—ill and starving too! There was a bundle of ready-made shirts in her hand—at least, it lay beside her as if she had drop-

ped it. We think she had sat up stitching day and night, till, as she took her work home, her strength failed, and she, maybe, fainted. Anyhow, they brought her in here."

"Oh, Amy—Amy! you should know of this!" again thought Reuben.

"She is no common person," whispered the nurse, as they reached the ward; "and she is really young, though, at first, I thought she was an old woman. When we took off her cap, such a quantity of fine, soft, golden-looking hair fell about her! She must have been pretty once."

Reuben stepped softly to the side of the bed where the woman was lying. Her eyes were closed, and she seemed in a death-like stupor. All the night, the nurse told him, she had lain between life and death.

He had quaint ways. Some people called him old-fashioned. He stood by the couch of the sufferer, and said, solemnly, "The Lord bless and comfort thee!"

The woman opened her eyes with a weary sigh, as if the words had brought her back to sorrowful consciousness. She looked up at Reuben.

"Thank you," she said, feebly.

It was a cultivated voice; and the face was refined and intelligent. As he spoke to her—those words of comfort in which he was well skilled—the tears shone in her eyes. He was deeply interested in her. He was convinced that misfortune, not crime, had brought her to this dreadful crisis.

He wished to draw her sad history from her; not from idle curiosity—those who knew Reuben Howard could never have suspected it—but from the simple earnest wish to render her assistance.

How came she to lie here with that face, that voice, that link to another and a higher class of life? He wished to solve the problem. Had she any friends? Where were they to be found?

He put the question to her with tact and delicacy. He wanted to find some clue by which she could be rescued from the depth into which she had fallen. Had she kith and kin? They surely would not suffer her to die of want and misery.

But she shook her head. There was an expression of alarm and excitement in her face, that made him afraid of venturing further.

He had to go away, for the time, unsatisfied. But as he left the ward the nurse beckoned him aside.

"Here is a book, sir, as I have just found in the pocket of her gown. Perhaps it is her name that is written in it."

Reuben took the little volume. It was a prayer-book, and was handsomely bound. In the blank leaf was written, in a clear, bold hand:

"Margaret, from her affectionate husband, Ernest Seymour."

Reuben copied out the names into his pocket-book. He would not have forgotten them for the world.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## EVERY THING GONE.

"WHY, Jane, you have made us look the picture of comfort. It is the old time come back again," said Horace, as he glanced round the small, cosy room, where every article shone with

you were that high; and if Mrs. Vincent will make herself contented—I'm not used to lady lodgers," added the good woman bridling a little.

"Oh! but I am sure Ruth—"

He paused. What was he going to say—that Ruth would give her no trouble?



"THE LORD BLESS AND COMFORT THEE!"

the best of polish—cleanliness. "I declare I feel at home already."

"I am sure, Master Horace—excuse me calling you so, sir, it comes so natural—I am sure there's nothing I wouldn't do to oblige you, sir, if it was only because I've known you ever since

He was not certain of that in his heart. At any rate, Ruth was sadly out of temper. She had not spoken to him, except to say yes or no, for a fortnight.

His home was very wretched. He had no clinging to it, as might have been supposed.

Waste, disorder, and neglect—the three, like weird sisters, were running him down!

He was sure that he had done right in the step which he had taken. And he did not care for the attitude his wife had chosen to assume. Her interests were bound up with his, whether she knew it or not, and he must rescue both.

His hopes revived, as he looked round this peaceful haven. Here order, and industry, and cleanliness had their abode. In the hands of his old and faithful servant his affairs would begin to mend. At any rate, the reign of destruction would be stayed.

He walked home briskly. He had decided to remove the next day. Ruth had been warned of this, but he could not perceive that she had taken any steps. The few articles which he intended to take with him he had packed himself. In fact, every scrap of business, in doors and out, was his province. He had made all the arrangements. Ruth sat by her fireside and read her novels without the least concern.

It was the last evening in the house which should have been so blessed. Horace was anxious to come to some understanding with his wife—to patch up some kind of reconciliation; to live with her on these unhappy terms, under another's roof, seemed to him simply disgraceful. Besides, he yearned for peace. His tastes were all domestic and homelike. He seemed, so to speak, to hover round the altar, even when the household gods had departed.

Ruth was sitting as usual with her book. That persistent and frivolous reading had become to him intolerable. Yet what else would she do? There was a strange vacuum, and nothing to fill it.

He was in one of his kindest humors. There was an amount of benevolent forbearance in his nature which could not easily be exhausted. He would still love and cherish her—this foolish woman—if she would let him.

"So, Ruth, we are going to-morrow. I am sure the little wife will like her new home."

Ruth gave an impatient push with her elbow. She was sitting at the table reading. Her obstinate and unfriendly attitude acted like a chill.

He said, gravely, "I am sorry that you fail to look at the matter from the right point of view; that you ignore the fact of my being driven to take the step, not so much from choice as from necessity."

"There is no necessity about it," she said, rudely; "only I wish I had known."

"Known what, Ruth?" He spoke hastily and sharply. "Known what?"

"Known how miserable I should be; and that instead of getting a nice home, I should have to go into lodgings."

"And if you had known, Ruth, what then?" he felt impelled to ask.

"Of course, I should have minded better," replied she insolently; "I should never have had such a come-down as this!"

He was pale to his lips with just indignation. A minute after he said, quietly and temperately, for he was struggling to gain the mastery over himself, "Ruth, it seems we are not to understand each other; but at least we might avoid rude speeches, and an open breach of the restraints which good manners impose upon us. I shall require this of you, if I am to meet with disappointment elsewhere."

"I shall always say what I think," replied she, rudely.

He did not answer her; nor did he seek refuge, as before, in solitude. The days were gone by when he might have used this feint as a device to win her back to him.

No; he had chosen his own destiny, himself forged his own chains. He must abide the consequences. He would not be driven from his fireside by her evil humors. He would go his own way—follow his own employments. Be kind to her if she would; if not, he would let her alone.

A strange chill of indifference was creeping over him. Was it creeping over her as well? He had a great deal to attend to that night—the eve of this removal. In the morning he said to Ruth, as he went out, "We dine in our new lodgings, Ruth. I shall bring a cab for you. Is your luggage ready?"

She did not speak, but he saw a tear trickling down her cheek. He was by her side in a moment.

His kind heart softened. He was so ready to catch at the slightest symptom of repentance and amendment.

She turned away from him, but she was crying. He saw that plainly, and he would not urge her too strongly.

She was sorry, no doubt, for the past. Her ill-temper and perverseness, very likely, lay only on the surface. He was not going to remember against her any thing she might have said or done in perverseness or ill-humor. It was a vexation, no doubt, to her to leave her bridal home.

Poor Ruth! and he fell back upon the softening recollection of her youth and inexperience, and all the rest of the excuses he was wont to frame, and which staved off the extremity of the ill.

He left her weeping, but he felt there was a hope for him born of those tears. He would renew the attempt to make her happy. No matter how incompatible in disposition she might be, her claim upon him was unshaken. He would love and cherish her, let the mistake have been what it might.

The morning passed away quickly. It had been arranged that he should install Ruth in her new home, dine with her, and return to wind up matters finally. He ordered a cab at the time appointed, and rode down in it to his house. He hoped Ruth would be ready. On the strength of those tears he fancied she would not give him any further annoyance, and he was prepared to meet her without a single reminder of the past.



He went into the house. It was in strange confusion. Some kind of packing had evidently taken place. Up stairs, his wife's chest of drawers was empty. The door of the wardrobe, where her dresses used to hang, was open. Every thing was gone!

"Ruth! where are you? I am ready," he said, speaking loud; for he thought she could not be far distant.

But no Ruth answered. He sought her everywhere, but in vain.

All at once his eye fell on a note which lay on the dressing-table, and was directed to him. He opened it—it was from his wife!

"HORACE,—I don't mean to be driven into lodgings, so you may go by yourself. My friend Mrs. Mudford, whom you treat so ill, has taken me in. I am going to live with her, which I shall like a great deal better.

"RUTH VINCENT."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"WHERE IS MRS. VINCENT?"

WHAT! have his domestic sorrows made the talk of the town? Have this secret chamber, where the skeleton had its abode, and which he would sacredly refuse ever to reveal—have it thrown wide open! and by the egregious folly of the woman who was his wife!

Fancy her pouring out her griefs in the ears of a Mrs. Mudford! Fancy the fabulous grievances, the insane exaggerations, the misrepresentations, the train of ills which would follow on this disastrous step!

He was thankful for one thing! The step had been recently taken. There was scarcely time for the affair to take root, even in the fertile soil of East Bramley. He would follow her quickly. He would insist on her return at once—that very moment!

Even in his excitement—and the man was stung almost to frenzy—he did not forget what was due to her. He let no word escape him which reflected on her conduct. He told the servant, quite in an indifferent tone, that he was going to call for his wife at Mrs. Mudford's.

And thither, in the same dispassionate tone, he directed the man to drive. When he was inside the cab he wrung his hands in very agony, as he thought of her folly.

The cab soon reached its destination. It had but to go across the market-place. Then Horace sprang out, and rang and knocked at the door.

The cabman was desired to wait, in the event of his bringing Ruth back.

He was shown up stairs into a gaudily-furnished drawing-room—the standard, in Ruth's eyes, of all that was elegant and beautiful. He glanced round it, and shuddered.

Presently Mrs. Mudford came to him. She was a large, fussy woman, with an important

face and emphatic manners; but he knew what she was. He had not to begin to study her character now.

"I am not surprised to see you, Mr. Vincent," she began, "though you haven't been so ready with your visits neither, considering what near neighbors we are—"

"Madam," said Horace, quietly, though he trembled with annoyance, "my visit can have but one object. Will you have the goodness to summon Mrs. Vincent?"

"Ah, poor thing!" and Mrs. Mudford assumed an air of compassion that was intensely provoking; "she's got a sad handful! At her time of life, too, when she ought to be the gayest of the gay!"

"I do not know, madam, to what your remarks tend," he said, scarcely able to restrain his indignation; "but at least you will allow my request to be a reasonable one. I wish to take home my wife."

"Home, indeed! Ah, poor thing! she little thought what she was coming to—to be driven from her nice house, and put under a servant!"

This, then, was Ruth's version. He stood aghast at its want of veracity; but he was not going to plead his cause with Mrs. Mudford. Heaven forbid!

"Shall I ring the bell, madam? Will you allow me to see my wife?"

"Oh yes; you may see her. Poor thing! you will find it hard to take her from me."

Horace made no reply to this. He stood looking very stern and very angry.

In a few minutes the door opened, and in came Ruth.

She had her bonnet off and her hair smoothed, as though she had come intending to stay. Her face had its old obstinate expression, intensified to the last degree.

"Ruth," said the calm voice of Horace, friendly, even now, "I can not believe for a moment that you will refuse to return with me—to your home, Ruth, and your husband."

"You hear what he says, Ruth, my dear," said Mrs. Mudford, "do just as you like; don't let me persuade you. They might say it was because I took your part. Of course, I know."

"Come, Ruth," said Horace, ignoring the very existence of Mrs. Mudford, and eager to rescue his wife ere mischief could be inflicted. "Come, my love," and he would have taken her by the hand.

Ruth moved back a pace or two.

"No," said she resolutely, "I will not come, unless you will stay in the house."

"Poor dear, it is but reasonable," murmured Mrs. Mudford.

"But that is impossible, Ruth; I have let the house," replied Horace, scarcely believing she could be so void of understanding. "The tenant enters upon it to-morrow."

"I do not care; I will not go."

What should he do? The larger woman—

perhaps the greater simpleton of the two—was evidently prepared for a scene. She was one of those persons who delight in it; and she owed Horace a grudge for being, as she expressed it, so “stuck up.” He had no wish to gratify her; besides, he could not believe that Ruth, in cool blood, would persist in remaining

low. Affection, duty, all those womanly perceptions of right and wrong, from which he still sought to hope something, would plead with her. She would follow him, and this disgraceful business be ended.

Telling her he should expect her shortly, and with a slight bow to Mrs. Mudford, whom he



“I WILL NOT GO.”

away from him, or that the master of the house, whatever might be the incredible folly of its mistress, would allow such a state of things to be. His most dignified course, and the course most adapted to calm the present irritation, was to go quietly away. Ruth would be sure to fol-

felt he could not tolerate much longer, he went down stairs.

“Is the lady a-coming?” asked the cabman, as he opened the door of his vehicle.

“She is not quite ready,” replied Horace, promptly, and getting into the cab.



How many more excuses would he have to make for her that day?

Jane Wilson was standing at her door, looking up and down the street.

"Well, to be sure, and I did think you late," said she, as the cab stopped. "I began to be afraid the dinner would be spoilt. Why, where is Mrs. Vincent?" This was said as she looked into the cab, anxious to get sight of her young master's wife.

"Mrs. Vincent will be here soon, I hope," said Horace, in a tone as free from anxiety as he could make it. "We have brought you some luggage, you see, Jane."

"Oh, never mind, sir, don't you trouble; me and the cabman will see to that. Well, to be sure, I am disappointed not to see Mrs. Vincent."

Horace did not make any further remark on the subject. He stepped into the little sitting-room, where the cloth was laid for dinner.

Jane very soon bustled after him. She seemed possessed with but one idea.

"You see, sir, I have done all I could to make the lady comfortable. That little table will be nice and handy for her to sit and work at by the window; and I've shifted my few plants from the other room, to make the place look cheerful. Is she fond of flowers, sir?"

"Yes, I think she is," stammered Horace.

"And, up stairs, if you like to look, I have done the best I could. But, dear! how I am chattering! The meat will be roasted to rags. Shall you wait for Mrs. Vincent, sir?"

"I think I had better not, Jane. She may not be here just yet," he added, by way of postponing the subject.

"Ah; I dare say you are all in confusion, just the last day. But I can keep some dinner hot for her when she comes," continued the good woman, innocently. "She'll be fine and tired, poor thing!"

"I think she will have had her dinner, Jane, thank you, and now I shall be glad of mine."

It was not that he cared to eat, but he would be glad of any interruption to the topic in discussion; and he wished to put a brave face upon it, and not give rise to any suspicions. He was jealously sensitive on this head.

He had his dinner, apparently with his usual appetite, and in his usual spirits. If he looked a trifle pale and haggard, the good woman set it down to the fatigue of moving.

"I can soon cheer him up," said she to herself, as she cleared away the dinner-things. "He won't be like the same in a fortnight, Heaven bless him!"

Horace grew very nervous as the tea-hour approached, and he would have to quit his office and return home.

Would Ruth be there before him? At one time he entertained the delusive hope that she would tap at his office door, and enter in tears and penitence. But though several taps came, hers was not among them.

Jane Wilson was at the door, looking up and down the street.

"Dear heart! Why, you've come by yourself again!" said she.

"Mrs. Vincent has not arrived, then," replied Horace, as he hurried by her to hide the blank dismay visible on his face.

"No, indeed, she hasn't," continued Jane Wilson, following him. "I've been on watch all the afternoon. I sent the neighbor's little lad for the milk, because I didn't like to leave."

"At any rate, I will have my tea, Jane."

Jane looked shrewdly at him. He could not altogether hide it from her. She shrugged her shoulders, and went into the kitchen.

"If there isn't a squall about, my name's not Jane Wilson," thought she.

As the evening advanced, Horace grew almost distracted. His ear was strained to catch every footstep in the street. The rattle of a cab made him start up eager and excited.

Every thing depended on her return that night. If she refused, what a desperate breach might be opened! How difficult it would be to heal! What material the subject would form for idle, ill-natured tongues! He could not endure to think of it. He reached out pen and paper, and wrote:

"RUTH, MY DEAR RUTH,—Let me entreat you to return to me at once. You know not what mischief you will create if you refuse. Be wise, be conciliatory. Remember, we two are bound together for good or for evil. I pray God he may soften your heart, and induce you to return to your duty and your home."

"Your anxious and distressed husband,

"HORACE."

This note he folded and directed; then he went out in search of a messenger. He soon found one, and gave him the note, desiring him to place it in Mrs. Vincent's hands and to bring back an answer.

Poor Horace! The time the messenger was gone seemed to be an hour. It was getting late, but he walked up and down the pavement in front of the house, restless and unhappy, and almost in despair. When he saw the lad coming, he hurried to meet him.

"Well?" he cried, eagerly—"well?"

"Well, sir, I see the lady, and give her the letter. And when she read it, she said, says she, 'Tell Mr. Vincent not to write no more notes. I'm going to stop where I am.'"

"And that was all?"

"Yes, sir."

And the lad waited for the sixpence which Horace had promised him. Horace gave it to him, and went in-doors.

"Well, I am sure! What is the matter, sir?" exclaimed Jane Wilson, now really alarmed at his appearance.

"Nothing, Jane." He still tried to speak calmly; still fought against the grievous evil that was marching full upon him. "Nothing, only that you had better lock the doors and go to bed. Mrs. Vincent will not be home to-night."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

HER LADYSHIP TOUCHES THE RIGHT CHORD.

"AND so careful as we have been, Sidney!" exclaimed Lady Peters; "and so near the time, too, when all would have been safe! Who would have cared then what became of the child?"

"I am sure I should not, mother."

"Why could we not hold our tongues? No good ever comes of gabbling," continued Lady Peters, "and walls have ears. Oh dear! oh dear! there is no luck about you, Sidney. If any thing appears fair and promising, you are sure to be disappointed of it."

"I don't give it up, allow me to remind your ladyship."

"I should think not. We must do what we can. Mr. Easton is the person we must try to work upon."

"I thought of riding over, mother. Perhaps Adela may have relented."

"My dear, she is very obstinate. I tried to see her this morning—indeed, I did see her for a few minutes; but I could not get her to allude to the subject. No, Sidney, when a woman like that takes a fancy into her head, you might as well try to move a mountain."

"Ah, me!" and Sidney sighed, to do him justice, from the bottom of his heart.

He was very unhappy indeed. He had not slept all night, for thinking about Adela. Besides, so much else was implicated in this separation. He had begun to look upon certain things as his own—riches, for instance, and freedom from the necessity of giving himself any trouble. All this was to come to him with Adela.

And it was such a trumpety business which had undone him. A few words spoken inadvertently, and without suspecting that she could overhear them. He had been so careful up to that point. He had never let her guess what he was intending to do.

Still, it was impossible to give up all hope, and surrender the prospects which had been so enticing.

"I had better see Mr. Easton," said he, trying to pluck up his courage.

"My dear, I have sent for him. I wrote a note, asking him to come. I expect him every minute."

"Then I had better tell him—"

"Sidney!" said his mother, in an authoritative manner, "you had better let it alone. You have managed your affairs so badly that I begin to think they are better, in my hands than in yours."

"As you please, mother," said he, submissively.

From his childhood upward he had always succumbed to his mother.

"You had better retire, Sidney, and please do not make your appearance while Mr. Easton is here. You will very likely damage your own cause."

"Am I so devoid of tact, mother?" asked Sidney, with a smile.

"No, my dear; but I can make something out of your absence, and we must not lose a single point. Hark! there is some one at the door. I fancied I heard wheels. Go, Sidney, go!"

Sidney hastily departed. His mother drew a chair forward for her visitor, and sank in a languid attitude into the one opposite.

She was thus seated, her handkerchief in her hand, when there was announced, "Mr. Easton!"

"Good-morning to you, Lady Peters," said he, cordially. "You did me the honor of sending me a note, and here I am to answer it in person."

"You are very kind, I am sure," replied Lady Peters, in a languid tone. "You see the state I am in. I can not do a stitch of work, or open a book, or attend to any thing. Indeed, I feel only fit to be carried to my bed."

"Dear me! but what is the matter?"

"Matter enough, Mr. Easton. You have heard of poor Sidney's misfortune?"

"Indeed, I have not. The fact is, I have been from home a week. I only returned late last night. Your ladyship alarms me. Has Mr. Peters met with an accident?"

"Not an accident to the body, sir, else he might have borne it better. When the mind is hurt, Mr. Easton, the pain is far more intolerable," added Sidney's mother, mournfully.

"Pray explain yourself, Lady Peters; it is cruel to keep me in suspense!" exclaimed Mr. Easton, perplexed and alarmed.

"Well, then, really I hardly know how best to clothe such an ugly fact. It is all over between my poor boy and Miss Easton."

"All over?"

"Yes; there was some slight disagreement about the little girl. Excuse me, but it was scarcely wise of our dear Adela to take such a step—I mean, as regards her niece. Young ladies should have a little more regard to what is sure to happen, when they are rich and beautiful."

"I quite agree with your ladyship," said Mr. Easton, heartily. "It was a most unwise step. I thought so at the time."

"And, then, our dear Adela is not quite reasonable," continued her ladyship, in an insinuating tone. "Of course, a husband naturally expects no rival in the affections of his wife—such as an adopted child. He proposed to her, in the first instance—or she proposed to him, I forget which—that the little girl should remain with you."

"With me? Adela could hardly make such a proposition as that. She knows that I should send it to the work-house to-morrow," returned Mr. Easton, with a sharpness and severity that astonished even Lady Peters.

"Exactly, you have a right to do as you please. Our dear Adela should have remembered that parents do not like to be disobeyed," insinuated Lady Peters.

She had touched the chord she intended. She had roused the old dormant spirit. One daughter had disobeyed him—was the other about to do the same?

The color flushed angrily to Mr. Easton's face. "The matter will end thus, Lady Peters," said he, rising—"my daughter shall not be guilty of such incredible folly. I shall find means of bringing her to reason. Never fear."

"Oh! Mr. Easton," said her ladyship, the tears still trickling down her cheek, "I wish I could ask you to see my poor boy; but he will see no one. He is shut up with his sorrow. If nothing can be done, we must go; I must take him away from here—quite away!" and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, as if overcome by her feelings.

"Don't you trouble yourself, Lady Peters," said Mr. Easton, resolutely. "There will be no occasion for banishment, or for any thing else. Tell Sidney to keep up his spirits. I can manage Adela."

"How kind you are! See what it is to have a friend!"

He held out his hand to her.

"Now, don't you fret," said he, as if he were speaking to a child. "You and Sidney must come and dine with us to-morrow. You will see that all will be right. Pelaw! a mere lover's quarrel to destroy the happiness of a lifetime!"

## CHAPTER XL.

### NOT THE SPEECH HE MEANT TO MAKE.

The old arbitrary spirit was dominant in Mr. Easton's mind, as he rode home from the Tower. He hated to have the chord touched which had been broken and jarred all these years. Nothing but submission and absolute surrender could appease him. On this very point part of his domestic happiness had been wrecked. Was another daughter to go? He did not imagine, as he grew cooler, there would be any necessity for extreme measures with Adela. She could not possibly have ceased to love Sidney. If so, the fact baffled his comprehension. But he would take high ground with her in the beginning. It was like crushing an infant rebellion.

His first words when he reached home were to inquire for his daughter. Not receiving any satisfactory reply, he went in search of her himself. He knew that Adela had fited up a couple of disused rooms at the Hall. He guessed why she had done it, though he had passed the matter over in silence. The rooms were for the use of Margaret's child. The child had been kept out of his sight. He had made this stipulation. She was never to cross his path, and she never had. He had not even seen her. But, in his haste to find his daughter, he traversed the corridor which led to the rooms in question. He had searched everywhere else. Adela could be nowhere but here. He was still wrathful, and the very atmosphere of this part of the

house suggested thoughts that were annoying to him. He would make an end of the matter quickly. Though she were his own flesh and blood, she should obey him, or else she should be turned adrift like the other.

With this hard thought in his mind, he came in sight of an open door. He was on the threshold in a second. Here he should find Adela.

A little girl was standing in the middle of the room, her face puckered up into extreme earnestness while she was trying to fasten a new frock on her doll. There was no Adela, and no one else except the child.

The noise of his creaking boots made her look up. He could see her face distinctly. It was the face of his eldest-born—of Margaret! Margaret as she was once, many a year ago!

Memory, with her magic touch, carried him swiftly over the space which lay between this time and that. It carried him, whether he would or no, to the time when a little playful child climbed on his knee, or prattled by his side—his first, for a long time his only one. How he had loved her! How dear she had been to him! She had eyes of just such heavenly blue! They were his wife's eyes. She had just such golden hair as this—his wife's hair—the wife who had died so soon. How this little one reminds him of her—of her, and of Margaret!

The sight does not irritate him, as he thought it would. Those tender memories come flocking round and soften his heart. He holds out his hand, and the word comes from his lips quite tenderly, "Margaret!"

The little one was frightened at first. Her visitors are few and far between—and Aunt Adela is not here, nor the old nurse either. But she thinks it her duty to correct a mistake.

"My name is not Margaret," she said.

It was Margaret's voice—his wife's voice. Adela did not resemble her mother in the least. Margaret had been her living image.

"What is your name, then, my pretty one?"

"Ethel Seymour."

His brow darkened a little. But he said, a minute after, gazing at the innocent face and the eyes blue as heaven, "Ethel, will you come to me?"

She did not quite know. She was hardly prepared for such an act of familiarity. She glanced round, as if looking for a protector.

He sat down and took out his watch. "Ethel, come and see grandpapa's watch. Hark how it ticks!"

The blue eyes rested on him with mingled wonder and delight. She came to him in a minute, with the sweet confidence of childhood. The touch of that baby hand seemed to thrill through him. Very soon Ethel was on his knee. She played with the watch a little time, her face wearing a serious and wondering expression. Then she looked up at him—his arm was round her.

"Where is mamma gone to?"

It was a question she was apt to ask of stran-

gers. It made him wince. How could he tell? She had drifted away from him. To be a wreck or not? What had he cared? Yet this little one, born of the marriage that he hated, had crept into his bosom, and was probing the deepest wound he had—was asking him where was Margaret!

He has no part or lot in her now. She chose her destiny—let her work it out. It is no question for him to answer—"Where is Margaret?" Still he was softened. One stronghold in his rugged and stubborn nature had been taken by the innocent hands of a child.

He left the room. He did not wish to be



VERY SOON ETHEL WAS ON HIS KNEE.

He put her down hastily. There was a dimness before his eyes, and a quick throb at his heart. He did not mean to be unmannered, or to give up his point. This was mere weakness! Disobedience must reap its harvest. The thorn-tree can not bring forth grapes. Let her go!

found there. Pride and stubbornness are twin brothers. He would have felt ashamed.

There was another room close by. He knew as well as could be that Adela had fitted it up for herself, to be near her charge, and he opened the door. Yes, she was there. She was re-

clining in her chair, in an attitude strangely languid for Adela—she who was all strength and energy, and knew neither ache nor pain.

He was glad he had met with her at last. He said, kindly, for the spell of softness was upon him, "You should have let me know that you were ill, Adela."

"I shall be quite well soon," she replied, trying to assume her old cheerful manner; though the wan look on her face belied her words.

"What was it, dear?" he asked still kindly.

She turned away her head.

"Nothing that I need speak of now," she said, in a voice that struggled hard to be calm.

He sat looking at her. There was a sharp conflict in his mind. His thoughts were swayed this way and that by an indecision quite alien to his nature.

"Adela," he began at length, in rather a tremulous and husky voice, "if—if there's any difficulty about the child—"

Her face was towards him. She was looking at him with a strangely mournful expression.

"If Mr. Peters objects—and the fact need not so much surprise us—has it never occurred to you to have recourse to me—to your father?"

What a different speech from the one he had intended to make! The north pole and the south could hardly be more apart.

Still the same look of unutterable sadness. It seemed as if joy had forever left that face. But she held out her hand to him, and said, affectionately, "Thank you, dearest papa."

"Well, can it not be so, Adela? Can not the difficulty be removed by—by me?"

"Oh no!" she said, with a slight shiver—no."

He was surprised. He thought she would have closed with his offer at once. He began to feel annoyed, and the old arbitrary will to chafe.

"Adela, are you not trifling with your own happiness? What does this mean—this foolish quarrel between yourself and the man you have promised to marry?"

She bent forward, and sat in a stooping attitude, her face hidden in her hands. It affected him to see her—she who had been so full of hope and happiness. He spoke more gently.

"Whatever it is, Adela, I am convinced that the breach may be healed. You love him, do you not, my child? He has not forfeited your affection?"

She made a kind of inarticulate murmur. He could see how this conversation shook her. She trembled like a leaf—she, his strong, brave, invincible Adela!

"My dear, if you confide the matter to me, I will do my best to make all right again. The happiness of a lifetime is not to be lightly flung away."

Again she murmured, as she sat still stooping, and her black hair falling in unwonted disorder over her face.

"You will not be so mad as to break with him forever."

She raised her head with a touch of her ancient spirit. Yes, she said, she should. Why torture her with dwelling on it? She was no weak girl. She should recover presently. He had said it was so easy to deceive a woman.

The words dropped from her unawares, or rather were wrung from her by the agony of the moment. Besides, did she not owe some kind of explanation to her father? It would not have mattered to him, some hours ago, what the explanation might have been. His supreme will would have decided beforehand what she was to do, as it had decided on the fate of Margaret. But the spell of the blue eyes and the golden hair lingered yet. He had looked on the innocent face of the child, and he was softened.

He would not let Adela go as he had let the other. A vague wonder crossed the current of his thoughts as to the fate of that other. He had remembered many times the untasted cup of tea and the handkerchief wet with tears! Should he ever meet with her again? She had been very lovely. He could almost behold the shining hair and the gleeful eyes—could almost hear her light step and her carolling voice.

He knew she must be changed. That youth, and beauty, and gladness had all perished; for these were sure to go. The broken heart, and health, and hope might linger and drift about a while. Then they too would float down the current that leads far away from here!

## CHAPTER XLI.

### SIDNEY GOES OUT OF SIGHT AND HEARING.

"THERE, Sidney, you may go to the wars, or do what you like," said his mother, tossing him a note which she had just read, and then beginning to walk slowly up and down the room.

She was still walking, her hands clasped behind her, when he looked up, having finished reading the epistle.

"I can not help it, mother. The note is polite enough. It merely suggests that we should dine there another day."

"Which means that we shall very likely never dine there at all."

Sidney sat silent and moody. This was exactly the conclusion he was trying not to be forced into.

"Happily, there is your profession open to you," continued his mother, in a mocking tone. "The twenty-fifth of March is close at hand. You can take possession of your offices, and try to get clients."

"I have a great mind to emigrate."

"Nonsense! Your heart is not broken, is it?"

How she sneered at him! How pitiless was her eye and her manner! How cutting her voice!

But Mr. Easton knew nothing of this. He had quite a different picture before his mind.

"At any rate, I shall run away for a fortnight."

"I have no objection to that, Sidney. Indeed, I think it would be better. I shall not give up the game entirely, and you must be prepared to come back whenever I send for you."

"Yes, mother," replied Sidney, submissively.

Presently he got up and went to his room. He was bitterly disappointed. He hardly cared where he went or what became of him.

On the score of his future prospects, and concerning the loss of that free-and-easy life on which he had been reckoning, he was the most inconsolable. There were other women in the world besides Adela, only there would be another wooing to be gone through, and delay was hateful to him.

He thought, after some reflection, that he would go to Cliff Bridge, by the sea.

It was a pleasant place, not likely to be full at this season. But somebody would be there, for it was resorted to in winter and in spring for the sake of its mild climate.

Cliff Bridge had good hotels, a pier, and various resources. It was rather a successful idea. And having made up his mind, he was soon ready to start.

"Good-bye, mother; I'm off!" said he, some hour later, as he looked in at the drawing-room door.

"Good-bye, Sidney," said she, coolly.

She hated unsuccessful people. Even her own son could barely be tolerated under a failure.

He was soon rattling along in the train, and leaving East Bramley behind him.

He had very little money. His mother had supplied him with just enough for his journey, otherwise he would have gone to the first hotel in the place, and called about him like a lord. As it was, he was driven to take a couple of rooms for the week. They were pleasant rooms, and just opposite the sea. He could not have the first floor, because of an invalid lady who was occupying it.

Sidney, who was thoroughly selfish, pricked up his ears at the word invalid.

"Nothing catching, I hope, my good woman!" he exclaimed, in alarm, when the landlady apprised him of the fact.

"Oh dear no, sir! I call it a wasting away—a kind of consumption, you know, sir."

"Bless me! Has she a cough? Consumptive people are not very nice neighbors."

"Not a bit of it, sir. She goes out in her chair—"

"That's right," interrupted Sidney, careless about other particulars. "Now, Mrs.— What's your name, pray?"

"Mrs. Martin, sir."

"Mrs. Martin, I am very hungry. Please to attend to my corporeal wants. Such a thing as a good steak and a cup of tea would be most acceptable."

"All right, sir; I'll see to it directly. You'll hear the poor lady's chair come for her, sir, and

you can see her go off," added the woman, as though suggesting some kind of amusement for her new lodger.

"As beautiful-looking a young man as ever I see in my life!" said she to herself, as she went into the depths of her underground kitchen.

"Not I!" said Sidney, as he flung himself on the sofa. "Hark! I suppose that's the chair coming grinding by the window. I won't get up. Why should I? An invalid wouldn't repay the trouble. Some poor cadaverous wretch, I'll be bound. I'll change my rooms to-morrow! Heigho! that's the invalid coming down, I suppose. A man with her—perhaps her husband. No, I won't get up. I'll lie and think what a luckless dog I have been. What am I to do now? There goes the chair grinding by the window again. If the blind were up—but it isn't—I might have seen. Pahaw! What do I care about seeing?"

"What am I to do? That law business is like being shut up in an iron cage. Besides, I know I shan't succeed; no man ever did unless he had industry and perseverance, two attributes which were omitted when nature did me the honor to present me to society."

"It is awkward to go on living at the Tower. My respected cousin might choose to take to himself a wife, and sweep his house clean of us. I wish I could light upon a rich widow, or some one with convenient resources, and who would not object to a dilettante for her husband. A certain portion of mankind must work, of course, else the world's business would stand still."

"Well, I must marry. Every body knows the preponderance of the fair sex—a fact greatly in my favor, and which it encourages me to reflect upon."

As Sidney finished his cogitations, he rose and took up his hat. He thought he would have a stroll on the esplanade, and see what phase of human society was presented by the place he had come to.

The esplanade was rather a long one, and seats were placed at intervals. Sidney soon took possession of one, and sat gazing at the great wide sea, flecked now with gold and purple, and with here and there a white sail glistening in the setting sun.

There was a sprinkling of persons walking to and fro, but none that attracted Sidney's attention. He had fallen again into a reverie, when a grinding sound made him look up. A chair was being wheeled along; the invalid, no doubt. Come, that was something to excite a faint, passing interest. He was about to go home; he would wait a minute till the chair went by.

A tall, upright figure was striding along by the side of the invalid. Surely he had seen that figure before. They come nearer, nearer still. A damp chill breaks out on Sidney's forehead. He crouches back, and draws his hat over his face; but he can see clearly, too clearly. He would get up and depart, but he seems fascinated; he can not help looking; he is rooted to the spot.



A slight girlish figure, a face lovely in its pallor and unearthly delicacy; white hands lying listlessly before her; large hollow eyes, with a glassy brilliancy that is frightful to behold; an appearance as though life and youth had been struggling with disease and death, and were giving way at last—this is what presented itself to the eyes of Sidney.

He got up and hurried away. He dare not encounter Reuben. His limbs trembled, his face was ashy pale. He reached his lodging, and shut himself in. He felt as if the avenger of blood was behind him. It was his doing. That girl with hollow eyes and wasted features was Amy, and he had murdered her!

Stay; let him think. He is agitated and confused. Did not the girl once write to him? Surely she did. Here is the letter unopened; he had forgotten it; but he reads it; his hands tremble so that he can hardly hold it.

They are coming back. There is the grind of the chair. He can not flee anywhere. He must hear the girl brought in, supported evidently by her brother. He must hear her say in the voice so feeble and broken, but so familiar,

"No, Reuben, dear, do not carry me yet; I will try to walk as long as I can, Reuben, else I shall think it is the beginning of the end."

## CHAPTER XLII.

### MR. MUDFORD DETERMINES TO MIND HIS OWN BUSINESS.

THE omnibus that met the three o'clock train came rattling up from the station, and stopped at the door of the ironmonger's residence in the market-place. Forth from it stepped Mr. Mudford, and entered the house with the meek, subdued air of a man thoroughly and unmistakably henpecked.

There was not much fuss made about his coming home, though he had been away a fortnight. But this was no unusual oversight, so the little man quietly stole up stairs into his dressing-room. He had barely time to take his comb and brush from his portmanteau, when the door opened, and in walked Mrs. Mudford.

He was glad to see her, of course, but he looked surprised, and as if he had not expected the honor of the visit.

"I hope you are all quite well, my dear," he ventured mildly to observe.

"I don't know about that, Septimius." (The name Mr. Mudford's parents had chosen as most appropriate to him.) "Of course, I don't expect any sympathy; but the treatment we poor women have to go through is astounding!" and the lady raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Any thing fresh, my dear?" inquired her husband, who was brushing his hair at the glass.

"Yes, it is fresh, sir; as you are pleased to use the word, it is quite fresh."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"I mean that your fine friend over there, Horace Vincent, has driven his wife out of house and home."

"My dear, pray speak more respectfully of Mr. Vincent; I assure you he is one of the most excellent young men in the town."

"Of course, because he is exactly to your taste; a man who ill-treats his wife is sure to be."

A smile passed over the placid countenance of the ironmonger.

"When you have had the goodness to explain the matter to me, Harriet, perhaps I shall be able to give an opinion."

"Am I not explaining all the time? The poor thing has had no comfort of her life for months past. I *know* what she has suffered."

Mr. Mudford was silent. He was hunting in the portmanteau for his slippers.

"And now what does he do? He won't allow her a penny of money—not a penny! and he turns her out of her nice home into nasty cheap lodgings kept by a cross old woman, who will tyrannize over her to death."

Mr. Mudford had some difficulty in finding his slippers. When he had succeeded, he said, "It is no business of ours, my dear, what steps Mr. Vincent chooses to take."

"That is just like you—just like a *man*!" cried Mrs. Mudford, lifting up her hands. "You would not care if the poor thing had to beg her bread from door to door."

"My dear, you put an extreme case," said Mr. Mudford, with the utmost mildness and urbanity.

"No, I don't; and if I had not taken pity on the poor thing, and taken her in—"

Mr. Mudford turned round so hastily that his wife was stopped in the middle of her speech.

"What did you say, Harriet?" he asked, with an energy and decision that startled her.

"Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Vincent is here in this house?"

"Why not, pray? Who was to stand by her if I did not?"

"And when did she come?"

"Yesterday."

She was taken by surprise, and a little frightened. Her husband had never looked at her in that way before.

"And against her husband's consent did she come?"

He was standing before her, with an expression of annoyance such as she could hardly have imagined that meek, placid face capable of wearing.

"Was it with his consent or without it, Harriet?"

She was decidedly frightened. She tried to bluster a little, but he silenced her.

"Harriet, I am ashamed of you! No, I will hear no particulars. The squabbles of a husband and wife are no business of mine. But one thing I insist upon—Mrs. Vincent returns home at *once*."

"It is like your barbarity," she began, in tears.

"Harriet, you are a greater simpleton than I gave you credit for. Where is the girl?"

"Surely, you will let her stay till after dinner."

"Yes, I will do that. I don't wish any one to go away dinnerless. But after dinner she leaves the house."

Mrs. Mudford gave a gulp, as if she were swallowing down her indignation. She was in a difficult position as regarded Ruth.

Ruth, sweet and smiling as ever, was going along the hall to the dining-room, when a large, eager hand closed upon her arm.

"Ruth, my love, come here—come here."

"I think dinner is ready, Mrs. Mudford."

Ruth's appetite was of the most equable kind. Nothing interfered with it.

"No it isn't, for a quarter of an hour yet. Step in here, Ruth. I have something very particular to say."

Ruth, rather disappointed, followed her friend into the breakfast-room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Mudford, sinking into a chair, "I have got such a turn! Oh, dear me! what will become of us?"

Ruth looked alarmed, and anxiously inquired what was the matter.

"Matter enough, my dear! He says you are not to stay longer than after dinner. Did you ever hear of such a proposition?"

Ruth knew perfectly well to whom the pronoun *he* referred. It was the abbreviation by which Mrs. Mudford designated her lord.

Her heart sank within her like a stone. She had not calculated upon this.

She was not ashamed. There was the look of obstinacy called up on her face; but no blush of shame.

"I won't go back!" said she, resolutely; "nothing shall make me!"

"You are quite right, Ruth. I commend your spirit, my dear. If we poor women did not stick up for ourselves now and then, I don't know where we should be," added Mrs. Mudford, in a tone of self-commiseration.

Ruth was silent. Her lips were compressed, and her face was as unrelenting as it could be.

Still, she had no idea what she was to do, or where she was to go. She naturally looked to Mrs. Mudford for some suggestion.

That worthy individual was not long before she made one.

"I know what you must do, my dear. There is but one place where you can go; and I must bundle you off as soon as I can."

"Where is it?" asked Ruth, with some natural anxiety.

"To a friend of mine in the country; she wants a person to be useful. Of course, you have no money, Ruth?" This was said hurriedly.

There was a sound in the passage of the dinner being carried in.

"I have only a few shillings," replied Ruth.

"Ah, well! I won't fail you, my dear. I'll

pay your fare, and see you into the train. Trust all to me."

"But where—where?" asked Ruth, still anxiously.

"It is a little village, my dear; but there is a station. The place is called Brook, because of the water. My friend is a maiden lady of the name of Peckit. It will be just the home for you."

Ruth stood irresolute. The society of Miss Peckit did not seem altogether inviting to her.

Should she return home? Oh, no! She was not going to humble herself yet. Horace might miss her, and wonder where she was gone and be ever so unhappy. That was just what she wanted—to punish Horace.

"There is no time to lose," said Mrs. Mudford, alarmed; "you must be off this afternoon. I will pack your things and do all I can. You will never find a friend like me, not if you look for her from now till doomsday!"

Ruth made no response to this gush of friendship. She felt uneasy and disappointed; nay, one might go farther, and say dismayed.

Brook! The association was of a low damp hamlet, secluded altogether from the world. She liked East Bramley, and did not want to leave it.

"Is there nowhere in the town where I could go?" she asked.

"Not on any account, my dear! Besides, you could not be under your husband's very nose!" replied Mrs. Mudford, whose choice of language was not select. "No, no! Take my advice, and seem as if you were lost to him forever. It is by far the best way of bringing him to his senses."

At this point in the conversation the dinner-bell rang.

"Ah, we must go! Perhaps you would like not to come to table. Poor dear! you can not be very hungry after all this."

"Oh, but I am though!" exclaimed Ruth, honestly enough.

At dinner there was a kind of armed neutrality between husband and wife. Mr. Mudford would have liked to say a few stringent words to Ruth, but his wife took care that he should not have the opportunity. The moment the opportunity occurred, she had bundled Ruth out of the room.

"Now, my dear, the omnibus will pick you up at the door. You must make haste."

Ruth moved about in a mechanical, absent kind of manner. She was ill at ease, in spite of the ardent protestations of Mrs. Mudford.

A real friend would have taken the golden opportunity of arresting her steps; a real friend would have held the foolish woman back, ere she took a plunge into those troubled waters. But no such friend was at hand.

Mrs. Mudford was all hurry and importance. She wrote a letter to Miss Peckit for Ruth to take as an introduction; she helped to cram as many clothes as were practicable into her trunk, and promised to send the rest.



"Angelina Peckit is a delightful woman," she said to Ruth as she packed; "just the right person for you to be with. It is quite a providential circumstance that you are able to go."

Ruth silently wiped away a tear. If she had seen the anxious face that was looking from a certain window as, presently, the omnibus rattled by, I think she would have stopped in her career—I think she would have relented. But from the corner where he sat she could see nothing.

Mrs. Mudford was glad. She saw the face, and drew hastily back, lest Horace should catch sight of her, and suspect what she was doing. Not that she was positively wicked; extreme folly may achieve as much mischief as crime.

The omnibus reached the station punctually. There was the usual bustle, the ticket to be taken, the last words to be said; and then Ruth, still mechanical and stolid, and as if in a dream, was whirled off to Brook.

Mrs. Mudford was pleased with her afternoon's work. It got her out of a scrape, and was sure to torment Horace, whom she disliked vehemently, as little minds can dislike. As for Ruth herself, all further responsibility rested with Miss Peckit.

As she turned to leave the station, she came face to face with her husband.

"Dear me, Septimius!" and she looked as guilty and confused as possible; "what are you doing here, I wonder?"

"Just what I think is my duty, Harriet. I am finding out what you have done with Mr. Vincent's wife!"

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### RUTH'S JOURNEY OVER THE FENS.

It had turned dark and gloomy, and soon it began to rain. Ruth sat and listened to the rain-drops pattering dismally on the glass. She felt dejected, and uncertain as to her future prospects. If not remorseful, she was at least inclined to doubt the soundness of her policy. Only one thought consoled her. "Show a proper spirit, my dear, and he will soon knock under," was Mrs. Mudford's parting exhortation.

Well, she would show a spirit. He should see she was not to be put upon, though she had been a governess.

"If you had been a lady born, he would not have tried it on," again had suggested Mrs. Mudford; "I know the pride of the man."

These speeches, and sundry others of the same nature, were all Ruth had to fall back upon, if we except her native obstinacy.

The journey took four hours, and led across the Fen country. It seemed like going into banishment.

What kind of a person was Miss Peckit? and would her home be a comfortable one? were questions that began to interest Ruth, as the four hours drew to an end. She should not like

the neighborhood, that she clearly perceived. Was that dreary little place yonder, all on the flat open, without a tree or undulation, or any thing pretty about it—was that Brook?

Yes; the place was Brook. The train stopped and Ruth had to get out. Now she felt desolate indeed.

There was no one to meet her—she had not expected it—but she had Mrs. Mudford's letter in her pocket, and it was the only clue she could hold by in this part of the world.

Did she wish herself safe back in her happy home with her indulgent husband? I think she did. But the spirit of obstinacy had not died out. An inward monitor said to her, "Don't leave the spot where you are until a train comes up by which you can return. Go back, Ruth! Go back!" But obstinacy said, "Brave it out, Ruth, to the end. Don't return to him; let him come to you. Be firm, Ruth! Be firm!"

Ruth was firm. She looked about for some one to carry her luggage.

"I want to find a lady of the name of Peckit," she said.

"Oh, yes—Miss Peckit, you mean. Her as keeps the school."

"Oh, no!" began Ruth, hurriedly.

"There is but one Miss Peckit in the place," said the man, decidedly, as he shouldered the trunk, "and she's kep' a school ever since I can remember."

Ruth's heart sank within her. She had expected to encounter a little dullness and isolation, but the multifarious evils connected with a school were beyond her calculation. She wondered her friend at East Bramley had not apprised her of the fact.

"Be you the new teacher?" asked the man, who was disposed to be communicative.

"I—I don't know," stammered Ruth.

"Ah, you'll not take offense, ma'am. I thought maybe you might have been. She's a rare sight of teachers, has Miss Peckit, only none of 'em stop."

Ruth's heart sank lower and lower. Presently she came in sight of a tall red-brick house, which turned its grim face to the village street. Not that it derived any cheerfulness in consequence. A brick wall shut out every glimpse of the outer world.

The house belonged to Miss Peckit. A brass plate on the door gave this piece of information; also, that Miss Peckit was the proprietress of a select seminary for young ladies.

"It will not be too late, even now, Ruth. Before you take hold of the knocker, before the man has time to set down your luggage, go back, go back!"

"But he will be so triumphant if you do, and use you worse than ever. No, Ruth; be sure you hold out long enough. Be firm, be firm!" so whispered her evil genius. For are not good and evil forever wrestling which shall gain the mastery over our poor human souls? Does the struggle ever cease but with life?

By this time she had knocked and had been admitted. The servant-girl ushered her into a bare, comfortless room which felt as if it rarely knew the luxury of a fire. The window looked on a damp bit of ground, called the garden. A cracked piano in the adjoining apartment was going with all its might.

She had not long to wait. Almost directly there came in the proprietress of the establishment, Miss Peckit.

Miss Peckit was scarcely the sort of person to fly to in a situation of such delicacy. She was a hard-featured, dark-browed woman, with a voice as shrill as a clapper. She gave a steady and rather prolonged stare at Ruth through her eye-glass, then she referred to Mrs. Mudford's letter, which was open in her hand.

"I will explain *every thing*, my dear," Mrs. Mudford had said, emphatically, as she sat down to write the letter.

The result of the explanation was that Miss Peckit exclaimed, with an abruptness which made Ruth's ears tingle, "What a little goose you were to get married! Ah!" continued she, as Ruth made no reply to this observation, "if every silly girl would take my advice, and do as I do, there would be a vast deal less misery in the world. Do you think *I* would get married?"

"No, ma'am," replied Ruth, meekly, and feeling obliged to say something. She was really alarmed at Miss Peckit.

"Well, then, don't talk of marrying, to me," cried Miss Peckit, with excessive shrillness and acrimony. "And now what is your Christian name, pray?"

"Ruth, ma'am."

"Well, Ruth, so you have come to me to be a teacher?"

"I don't know. I was not aware," replied Ruth, uneasily, a host of unpleasant circumstances staring her in the face.

But Miss Peckit did not allow her to finish the sentence. She had a habit of bearing down all before her. Ruth's feeble resistance was but a bridge of straws before a torrent.

"Yes, I want a teacher badly enough; I have been without one for three months. You are come to the right place, Ruth." And she bestowed a grim smile on the foolish woman who had let herself be entrapped.

Ruth again attempted to speak, but without avail; Miss Peckit again bore down upon her.

"I suppose Mrs. Mudford's recommendation will be a sufficient reference. She seems to have known you all your life. You understand music and French, of course?"

"Yes ma'am; but—"

"And of course you can work with your needle. I shall expect you to take charge of the wardrobes, and also to be with the pupils out of school-hours, and so forth. Well, I think I must make a trial of you."

"But, Miss Peckit—"

"You have good health, I hope. I don't allow holidays; they only unsettle the girls.

On my card of terms there is expressed, as no doubt you have seen, *no vacations*."

Ruth had not seen any thing of the kind.

"Well, Ruth, you had better take off your bonnet and go into the school-room. I will show you the way."

Ruth felt inclined to cry. She was alarmed at being thus caught and caged against her will; and it was hopeless to make Miss Peckit understand how matters really stood. Her head ached. She felt strange and desolate amid the twenty noisy girls, all talking at once, and in whose society she had to spend the evening. And most of all she wondered at the duplicity of her bosom friend, Mrs. Mudford. It was too late to think of taking any steps that night; there was no alternative but to endure the ills into which she had plunged herself until the next day. "Then I will go from here, at all events," thought Ruth, comforting herself with the idea.

But how was she to go? She had no money. Mrs. Mudford had paid for her ticket. Here she was, miles from home, and with a solitary half-crown in her pocket.

Never mind; she would write, not to *him*—oh, no!—but to her sympathizing friend and confidante, Mrs. Mudford.

She would tell her how wretched she was, and that she must come back to East Bramley. Of course, Mrs. Mudford, who professed such ardent zeal for her cause, would forward her a supply; she did not doubt it for a moment.

She scribbled a few hasty lines, and contrived to post them the next day. Her position was quite as disagreeable as she had suspected it would be. Constant and harassing labor, unruly pupils, scanty food, and comfortless lodging, these had Ruth obtained in lieu of the blessings a kind Providence had bestowed upon her. She began to suspect that she had made a mistake. Home seemed invested with new charms. Yes; any thing was better than this. She had even relented towards her husband. She thought she would go back to him.

But she must wait for a letter from Mrs. Mudford, and that good lady did not seem in any special hurry to reply to her. A week passed before an answer came. Ruth hurried to her room to read it.

"MY DEAR RUTH,—I am glad to hear that you reached Miss Peckit's in safety, and are quite happy under her beneficent wing. No, my dear, I can not lend you any more money. I hoped you would have sent me a Post-office order for the fourteen shillings and sixpence which I laid down for your ticket. He keeps me so short of cash I have not a penny to spare.

"Ruth, my dear, you were right to go away, and I would keep away if I were you. He goes about as saucy and smiling as ever. I met him yesterday, and he took off his hat quite jauntily. I never saw him look so well. They say he had a supper-party the night after you were gone—*champagne* and lots of things!

They kept it up till one in the morning. Isn't it just like a *man*?

"My poor lamb, do take care of yourself, and don't be writing to him, or doing any thing silly! I will let you know all that happens,

though that would be felt presently. "Smiling and saucy!" Then he did not feel her absence. Oh, no! Of course not! He was glad to get rid of her! Had not Mrs. Mudford said that the removal into lodgings was a trick,



SHE FELT STRANGE AND DESOLATE AMID THE TWENTY NOISY GIRLS.

and how he goes on. Where can you be more safe or more happy than at dear good Miss Peck-it's? I remain your faithful and loving friend,  
"HARRIET MUDFORD."

Ruth stood looking into the damp little garden, the letter crumpled up in her hand. The sting was not in the withholding of the money,

because he thought the old servant would save his pocket, and play into his hands?

And a supper-party, too! Yes, he could have his *own* friends—perhaps that nasty Mrs. Jules, or that stuck-up Miss Easton! How she detested the whole set!

Yes; he could have champagne, and spend his money freely, now she was gone! She nev-

er wished for supper-parties; she never asked for champagne!

But she was not allowed to be mistress any longer. Jane Wilson was to be the mistress. Was it likely? and her face grew hard and bitter and obstinate, to the last degree; was it likely she would submit?

Go back! She should think not. She would rather stay here until she died!

Half an hour after, as she was going down stairs, Miss Peckit passed her.

"Well, Ruth, and are you quite settled?" she stopped to ask.

Ruth had the letter in her pocket. One hand grasped it tightly.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied, "*quite!*"

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THAT STEP IS REUBEN'S.

His dinner stood upon the table, but Sidney did not touch it; he did not even sit down to it. Cautiously, and still trembling in every limb, he crept up stairs to his room to listen.

Amy—his own Amy—the faithful, loving soul, who had clung to him, and rested her hopes on him—Amy, the fatherless, the motherless!—is not One spoken of as the avenger of all such?

He thought she would die. He heard her feeble voice, for the door of the room was open. And then he heard Reuben. Every note of Reuben's voice struck a separate terror into the mind of Sidney.

Reuben was reading to her—verses from the Bible. There was something very solemn in the sound. It arrested even the frivolous, worldly, volatile spirit of Sidney Peters.

He stood and listened. Dangerous as the spot was—for Reuben might find him at any moment—he could not force himself away; not until the reading was over, and there were movements and footsteps that made him hastily retreat.

What had he done? Committed a crime almost as black as murder! The girl was sound in health and full of hope and happiness a short time ago. Now it went to his very heart to think of what she was.

He knew they were poor. This man—this Reuben whom he so feared, and whom he tried to keep in the dark—was a hard-working curate, living on a scanty stipend. Amy had come to be dependent on him. He saw it all clearly—the straightened means, the sickness, the forced journey, the forlorn hope. He saw it all—the whole array of griefs and trials and privations, clear and distinct, lay before him.

He had laughed at broken hearts and disbelieved in their existence. That soft white hand of his, so caressing and yet so cruel, had taken a bawble to play with and to beguile a passing hour: the bawble was the poor crushed heart of Amy!

Oh, he had been very vile! He thought so, as he stood within the shelter of his room, and where Reuben could not come across him. His conscience, usually so lethargic, woke up, and lashed him with a whip of scorpions.

All other phases of his existence—the late blissful hours passed with Adela, his love for Adela, the hopes he had built upon her, his disappointment, his future uncertain career—all vanished from his mind.

This little episode, taking place in a corner of the busy, noisy world, unseen and unknown of most men, riveted his attention. It was full of the deepest and most tragic interest.

Hark! and his face turns white, and every nerve trembles. Hark! that step is Reuben's!

Shall he speak to him? Shall he take one step from this place of horrors?—one step nearer to his Father's house, from which he has wandered?

If he does, it must be *now*. The opportunity let slip, may never be reclaimed. It will be very dreadful! It will be like coming face to face with the avenger—this meeting with Reuben Howard!

He rose up. You would hardly have known the gay, gallant Sidney Peters. He moved to the door, trembling, shrinking, and abject.

Reuben was coming. Another instant, and he must meet with him. Should he flee away? The world is wide; he might easily escape. He never need hear again of Amy!

But no! He must do something. His heart has never been so touched before. That crust of adamant is broken up. He is full of the bitterest remorse. He is in an agony to think of what he has done.

Reuben is in the passage. He is stopping to speak to the woman of the house. He is telling her to take care of Amy while he is away.

Sidney stood in the doorway, his hands clasped, his head bowed, his eyes cast down. He had become very humble. He could have lain in the dust at Reuben's feet.

The slight conversation had passed. On came the footsteps, rather quicker than before. All at once they stopped. Yes; the moment had come. Reuben had seen Sidney Peters!

Human nature is strong even in the purified breast of the Christian. This man, so mortified to the world, with every passion curbed and bridled, yet looked as if some fury had possessed him. He stood a moment speechless. Then, raising his hand to heaven with a gesture as though he would call down vengeance, "O God," cried he, in the bitterness of his soul, "what forbids it that justice should not strike this man dead?"

Sidney shook in every limb. Was he, then, entirely condemned?—cast out beyond the reach of forgiveness?

Did Heaven's own minister, the minister of love and reconciliation, pass him by as too vile for mercy? for Reuben, with those dreadful words on his lips, was gone.

Oh, it was very terrible to feel this guilt on



his conscience! It was too late, then, for restitution?

There came dimly across his mind some early readings of a Book he had neglected for years—of those who knocked at the door, and found it closed, to open not again.

Had he not heard somewhere of a day of

"Too late! too late!"

A hand is laid on his shoulder. The touch is kind and conciliatory. Reuben has come again. Not in anger. Oh, no! that has passed. The fury was not ungovernable. It raged a moment, and was then suppressed and repented of.

Who is he that, in his human infirmity, he



A HAND IS LAID ON HIS SHOULDER.

grace which was passed—of a period spoken of as too late!

The man so full of resources—the subtle tempter, the gay flutterer in the scenes of folly—is on his knees.

Bitter is the groan he utters.

should pass the sinner by? Is it not his office, without exception or partiality, to win souls to God?

It might seem hard to return—to stand by the man who had wronged him, and address him as a brother. If he had let his mind dwell

on the fading form of Amy, it would have been harder still.

But the rather he strove to fix his eyes on One who is our great Pattern and Exemplar: and with the power of that remembrance in his soul, he could speak words of comfort even to Sidney Peters.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### MORE POTENT THAN HE THOUGHT.

"I WILL do any thing—I will make any restitution in my power—only tell me!"

This was the earnest declaration of Sidney Peters. He would have gone to Amy that minute; he would have taken her to his heart. He would have cared for no impediments. His life should never be as it had been; he would enter the lists with honest and honorable men, who lived by the toil of the hand or the brain. His sloth, his giddy hunt for pleasure, his indifference to the responsibilities which attached to him, should be no more. This was a momentous period in his career. After this, things should assume a new character.

He had risen in his eagerness, but Reuben held him back. There was a mournful meaning in the way in which he checked him. It was evident he dared run no risk as far as Amy was concerned. Joy, as well as sorrow, might be fatal. He did not say so, nor did he trust himself to mention her name. It was better for him to keep that subject in the background.

He was in a position of some difficulty. He dared not leave, as he had intended. Pressing as his duties were, here was one still more imperative. He dared not trust Amy under the same roof with Sidney. He knew nothing of love—we have said so before—but one fact was familiar to him. Love was headstrong, impulsive, and often reckless. If Sidney's affection was roused—if his vehement assertions were to be believed—then it would never do to be absent; Sidney might be resolved on an interview with Amy, and the agitation be fatal.

No; he was her only protector. He would stand by to guard her to the last.

Still, it administered a vague consolation to think that this man, who had done such a grievous wrong, was penitent. A hope—visionary, he feared—came into his mind that perhaps the deadly wound might be healed—that it might not be too late to revive this drooping flower.

He knew what he must do; he must pray.

The silver waves, curling and cresting in the moonlight, the starry lights twinkling in the evening sky, were alone cognizant of Reuben's prayer. He went out to hold a few moments' communion with his God. He had been used to do so in the straits and perils of his checkered life, and this secret, holy intercourse had held him calm and anchored, let the waves be never so unquiet.

When he returned, it seemed to have come

into his mind what he ought to do. The tumult of his feelings had subsided. He was self-possessed, and ready for the emergency, whatever it might be.

He had decided to let Amy know what had happened.

There were reasons for this; her fast declining health; and the danger in which he considered her to be. The remedy was hazardous, but it might arrest the progress of the heart-sickness which was consuming her. Sidney's return might save her life. But was Sidney sincere? was his repentance merely of mushroom growth, to spring and fade in an hour?

Reuben thought not, and his experience of human nature was varied and extensive. Besides, he intended to be plain with him. There must be no hesitation or holding back. If Amy recovered, he must take her for his wife. Sidney was not the husband he would have chosen for his sister; far from it. It had been the desire of his heart to unite her to some pious and God-fearing man; but the choice had been taken out of his jurisdiction. He had only to do with matters as they stood.

He told this to Sidney, every word. He hid nothing from him of what was in his mind; and when he had done so, he stole softly up stairs to Amy.

She was surprised to see him. She thought he had gone some time ago.

He came and sat by the sofa on which she lay. She was very glad he had come back. She took his hand and held it in hers. She clung more fondly than ever to her brother Reuben.

"I am so lost without you, dear! I dread those days when you have to go. But I am trying not to be selfish, Reuben; I am trying to be better, and more like you. I can even read the tract now—the little crumpled tract that you cherished so tenderly. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, Amy."

"I think I am more patient than I used to be. Is it patience, dear, or as the poor bird feels when it has beaten itself against the bars till it can beat no longer? Oh Reuben! Reuben!" and she turned round with one of her restless sudden movements, and hid her face in the cushions.

He let her lie a few minutes. He was very pale, and his heart throbbed strangely. He had no idea what would be the consequence of the words he was about to speak.

"Amy," he whispered, and the great drops stood on his forehead; "my sister Amy, listen to me. I have seen him; the man you love."

There was a deep, an awful stillness. The soft splash of the waves was heard distinctly on the shore. Within the room, nothing!

She lay motionless. The fair hair scattered on the pillow, the white arm, once so rounded, flung back with a despairing gesture. For the moment a faint dread made his lips pale and almost livid. But he nerved himself with a desperate courage.

"Amy, I have seen him. Do you hear me, Amy? Have you forgotten Sidney Peters?"

She turned slowly round. He could see her face. He expected it to be ghastly. He thought she might die under his very eyes—die of the mere mention of the name. But no! The loveliest maiden's blush spread itself over her features. The sweetest smile played about her lips. She looked up to him with an expression which said plainly as words could speak—

"Did I not tell you he would come?"

Reuben stooped down and kissed her. Glad tears rained from his eyes. God knows what a burden had dropped off from his weary shoulders! What a sunny gleam had lighted up this place of peril and of darkness! He could whisper to her again. He could say with a courage that astonished even himself, "Sidney is here, under this very roof!"

"Oh!" and she started up with clasped hands. The effort was too much, and she sank again, so deadly pale that he thought he had killed her! But she revived to say eagerly and hurriedly—

"Reuben, if you deceive me— But you would not, Reuben, would you? Where is he? Oh Sidney! Sidney!"

The passionate yearning love depicted on the girl's face it is not possible to describe. Love of Sidney had taken hold of her very being. Was it not sheer idolatry and the creature-love that brings a snare? Looking from the high ground on which he stood into these troubled depths, Reuben was inclined to think so.

But this part of his mission had ended. He rose and moved towards the door. Her eager eye followed him; her lips were parted. There was a look of mingled suspense and keen expectation—an expectation so keen that, if it were protracted, she might die.

But he did not mean it should be. Up to this moment the girl's fate seemed to have been in his hands. Now he yielded it to another. He took Sidney by the hand, and led him up the stairs.

"You can see her now," he whispered; and then he stood a moment and watched.

Only for a moment. He heard the cry of rapture uttered by the girl as her lover entered. He saw Sidney bend over her, and then he came away.

His eyes were blinded with tears. He had never been so deeply agitated before.

The poor heart had found its rest, he thought. Ah! love must be very potent to play such desperate games with the affairs of men—more potent than he had imagined.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### SIR FREDERICK FINDS A HAVEN.

"He said he should call again in half an hour. He seemed very much put about that you were not at home," said a servant, who had

climbed up the steep staircase to Sir Frederick's secluded nook at the Tower.

Sir Frederick's face had a look of great uneasiness. He glanced round like a hunted hare.

The person referred to was Mr. Sibley. Mr. Sibley's influence and domination were beginning to be oppressively felt—that is, after the late interview with Kate Ormond, and after Sir Frederick had destroyed the letter.

He did not exactly know how to face him:

What should he do? Five minutes of the half-hour were gone already, and Sibley was the soul of punctuality. He would be here directly. The more the baronet reflected on the fact, the more uneasy he became. Physical fear he knew not of; but the tyranny of the stronger mind over the weaker made him the veriest coward. He would have fled anywhere to avoid Sibley.

What place should he go to? Need he stay to be hectorated over and browbeaten—to be forced to disclose that he had burned the letter?

He dreaded to think of those keen, persistent eyes, and the voice that, with all its softness and urbanity, could be so sharp and cruel.

Need he stay?

He was very tired. He had been poring over papers and reckoning numbers until his head swam. The air outside was fresh and balmy—the fields were green. Let him steal away and leave the battle unfought. At least, he should gain time—the chief resource of the irresolute.

He crept down the staircase, looking sadly like a poltroon, for all he had the best blood of the Mortons in his veins. He dared not delay to order his horse. He fled away on foot. Yes, the air was balmy—yes, it was verdant and beautiful out here. But what if he should meet with Sibley? Sibley had no end of devious paths. He was as likely as not to come upon one of them. He had better drop into some snug haven, and lie hidden till the storm had blown over.

There was a haven near at hand. Well, of all places, he had most right to go to it. He could see, where he stood, the chimneys of the farmhouse peering from the trees.

The meadow Farm held securely now by the Ormonds.

Would they be grateful?—would *she* be grateful? He was not thinking of Luke, or caring much either, if the truth must be told. But that firm, compact, decided little person called Kate had taken his fancy amazingly. Did he stand to her, as he wished, in the light of a friend and benefactor?

He liked the idea of having somebody to befriend. He himself was literally friendless. No one cared for him, no one loved him. If he went abroad to-morrow, what kindly eyes would shed a tear? What loving hand would hold his in a parting clasp?

This is what he said to himself as he walked along.

He was scarcely right, either, but he was disposed to look at things in the gloomiest light.

Should he step in through that wicket-gate? He thinks he will. Here is a place where Sibley can not come.

And in the garden, superintending improvements, and as busy as a bee, was Kate Ormond.

How pretty she looked! She had on the most piquant little hat with a cluster of rosebuds in front. The pink petals set off her black ringlets to perfection. She had a charming morning-dress also of pink. Pink was a color that became her to admiration. How energetic she was! Her very step was decision. She was laying down the law famously to the gardener, who was at work.

Sir Frederick walked towards her.

"I am afraid I intrude," he began in his irresolute, uneasy way. "I see how busy you are, Miss Ormond."

She turned towards him, and held out her hand.

"I am not busy at all," said she, cordially, "and if I were, I should always be delighted to so see you." And her eyes glistened with an expression that softened and made them quite beautiful. "We are so grateful to you!" continued she, eagerly. "You have been such a friend to us!"

"Do not say a word of that," replied the baronet, feeling more than a match for Sibley, when those eyes were upon him. "I am sure I was very glad to be of any service."

"Service! oh, you have saved us from such great misery!" continued she, as they walked towards the nurse.

"My brother Luke is going to be married," added she, with a little hesitation. "We have been doing up the old home for the occasion; I should like you to see it."

He walked by her side full of content. This is what he wanted—to be associated with some domestic circle, the sharer of their joys and sorrows. It was what had not occurred to him yet. He cast shy glances at her as he walked. He admired her extremely. He felt the force of her character by means of that inscrutable channel, unconscious influence. He thought her attractive beyond measure.

"See," said Kate, as she opened the glass door into the drawing-room, "all the papers in the house are my choice; my brother never can make up his mind."

"Which is just my case," suggested Sir Frederick.

"Nonsense! I shall not believe it of you. It is the worst thing in the world to be undecided."

How firm she looked as she said it! He would have given any thing to be half as firm.

Especially as, all the time, there floated before him a vision of Mr. Sibley climbing up the steep staircase to the chamber in the Tower. He was sure to be there by now. Oh yes, and to have found Sir Frederick gone.

It was very pleasant being here. He liked being shown about by Kate Ormond, and chatted to, and made a fuss with; it was so unus-

ual a circumstance. And to wander over the garden, and down the little meadow, all in the fresh spring weather, with the lark singing overhead, and with this most agreeable companion by his side, it was very pleasant indeed.

Still, he was a shy man, and nervous to a degree. He did not abandon himself to the rest and security of the moment. He was, as Kate said to herself, all in a fidget.

He was sure he was detaining her. He thought he must go. It was getting late. She must be tired,—and a dozen other irresolute, uneasy speeches.

She was in her brightest humor. Sunshine had shone out upon the Meadow Farm, lately so much in shadow. She was grateful and light-hearted, and resolved to make him pass a pleasant hour, whether he would or no.

Go! She should not think of it, until he had tasted her gooseberry wine, and plum-cake made by her own hands. "For I am quite a working woman," added Kate, laughing pleasantly.

He did not want to go; far from it. Besides, he knew that at this precise moment his room might be occupied by Mr. Sibley.

"And Luke will be home directly, and he wants so to see you. He will be so disappointed if you do not stay," urged Kate, powerfully. "I believe I hear him now."

It was Luke. And then hands were shaken, and hearty speeches made, and the little party were as friendly and as sociable as could be.

"Ah!" said Luke, as again they walked homeward, "there is the fence Mr. Sibley said wanted mending, and the unfortunate cow-house which the wind unroofed. Did you ever happen to see that note-book of his, Sir Frederick?"

"Yes," reluctantly admitted Sir Frederick, blushing a little.

"I suppose he gave the place a sad character; but you see, Sir Frederick, there was not a word of it true."

"Don't let us talk of Mr. Sibley," said Kate; "his name always makes me shiver. Perhaps he is plotting against us now."

"I don't care if he is, so long as Sir Frederick will be our friend," replied Luke, sententiously.

Sir Frederick was gratified by these remarks. As he sat chatting over the gooseberry-wine and looking at Kate, and hearing her decided little speeches, he thought he had never passed so pleasant a morning. He wanted to repeat the visit; to come and go just as he liked; it would make his life more cheerful by far, and nobody at home would miss him.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

SIR FREDERICK had been gone just twenty minutes, when footsteps were heard creaking up the old staircase. Then the door was opened,



and in came two persons, the foremost being Mr. Sibley.

"Why, he is not here!" cried Mr. Sibley, alarmed. "I wonder what he means by that."

Mr. Sibley might have been speaking of a servant absent without leave.

The other individual had by this time come into the room. He had not the confident air of Mr. Sibley. He seemed relieved, rather than not, by Sir Frederick's absence.

"Sit down, Harry Smith," said Mr. Sibley, in a patronizing manner, and as if he wished to reassure him; "you can make yourself quite at home here."

The person so addressed sat down, but still without appearing at his ease. He was much younger than Sibley, but his face was far more ploughed with wrinkles and furrows. Time had not dealt half so kindly by him. He was well-dressed, and yet not exactly a gentleman; not exactly belonging to the lower classes either. It was difficult to define what kind of a position he would be likely to hold. He had an uneasy, wandering eye; a habit of starting at every sound, and rather an incoherent manner; that is, he made absent replies to what Mr. Sibley said to him, as if he were thinking of something else.

Mr. Sibley was pleasant, and even jocose. He chatted to his companion after the most agreeable fashion. He repeatedly requested him to feel quite at home; for indeed this room was to him (Sibley) like his own. He was here half the day—in fact, he came and went as he liked.

"I dare say we can find a glass of wine in that cupboard, if you don't feel quite well," suggested Mr. Sibley, as he looked on the pallid cheek of his companion.

"No—oh, no! pray don't—I wouldn't for the world!" cried the latter, alarmed. "I could not swallow—"

"Oh, but that is sheer nonsense!" remonstrated Sibley, without, however, moving to the cupboard. "You must get over *that*, you know."

What the word *that* referred to did not appear. The conversation soon after began to flag, and Mr. Sibley to keep looking at his watch.

Where could Sir Frederick be gone to? It was very provoking, very ill-behaved, very unreasonable. His time was so precious, and it had been an appointment. When he found out, by questioning the servant, that Sir Frederick had gone out after receiving the message, he was very angry indeed.

"Never mind! I shall sit here until he comes back, if it be till midnight," said Mr. Sibley.

An hour passed—two hours—still Mr. Sibley sat on, and still sat on Harry Smith. One seemed like the shadow of the other.

Just two hours, and then came the well-known step up the crooked staircase. Mr. Sibley's brow was black as thunder, but a smile played about his lips. His companion drew his chair

a little nearer to him. He was evidently in a state of increased uneasiness.

Up came the poor baronet, whistling a merry tune. He was cheered by his visit to the Ormonds, and his heart comforted. He had not felt in such spirits for a long time.

And Sibley would be sure to be gone. It was his dinner-hour.

He should have leisure for reflection; and if needs be, and Sibley bothered him again, he could consult Kate Ormond. She would tell him what to do.

He opened the door, still whistling. He flung it back carelessly and walked in.

Close behind the door sat Mr. Sibley. As he turned round, a minute after, he saw him and his companion too.

No poor bird, caught in a trap, ever felt more alarmed or distressed than did Sir Frederick. It was a regular ambush, and how foolish of him to have fallen in!

He wished he had staid at the Meadow Farm. He was quite alone. There was no one to back him—indeed, two to one were against him.

Mr. Sibley got up briskly.

"You have kept us waiting some time, Sir Frederick," he said, in a tone which was meant to convince the baronet he did not intend to be trifled with; "and now you are come, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Smith."

Sir Frederick bowed with his usual courtesy, but he glanced at Mr. Smith with a vague kind of alarm. Mr. Sibley confirmed his fears at once.

"This is the witness, Sir Frederick, whom I went in search of, and who can attest the validity of that debt, you know."

Sir Frederick moved back a few paces. What should he do now? Should he be compelled to let Sibley know he had destroyed the letter?

There was a sharp, imperative little person, who would have clenched the matter in a moment, and beld her own even with Sibley: but she was not present. Besides—pshaw! why should he wish to screen himself behind a woman?

No! the battle must be fought, as all great battles have been from the beginning of the world until now. He cleared his voice nervously. Then he made one of his usual speeches. There was a courtesy about him that never failed under the most trying circumstances.

Any thing that Mr. Smith had to say he should be glad to hear.

"Exactly" (this was Mr. Sibley); "but first," and he spoke very decidedly—one might say, in a dictatorial manner—"first, you had better produce that letter, Sir Frederick."

Sir Frederick pretended not to hear; he was shuffling some papers about on the table. Every minute he grew more afraid of Sibley.

"I say you had better produce that letter, Sir Frederick."

"Oh yes—of course!" and the baronet got up, and with shaking hands proceeded to search in a chest of drawers that stood in the recess.

He knew he was not likely to find it; but he would have his back to Sibley, and he could gain a few minutes.

Always clinging to that straw in the waters!

There was an ominous silence, broken only by the rustling sound made by Sir Frederick. Mr. Sibley grew impatient.

"It is either there, or it is not," he said.

"Suppose I come and look."

It is astonishing how Sibley dared to go unmasked in the presence of his master; how insolent he could be, and what power he had over him! Sir Frederick might well wish for some one to back him against Sibley.

"No—no!" exclaimed he, turning round, and feeling that subterfuge would avail no longer; "you are right, Mr. Sibley; the letter is not here."

"And where is it, then?"

"It is destroyed."

He stood with his back to the chest of drawers, leaning against them. He was very pale, and evidently frightened.

Mr. Sibley advanced wrathfully.

"Destroyed! And pray who has dared to do that?"

"I have," replied Sir Frederick. The word "dared" had roused his natural courage and done him good. Sibley saw how unwise he had been to use it.

"Who has ventured, I ought to say. The letter was of the utmost value. However, thanks to my exertions, it is not absolutely needed. You see, I have produced a witness," and Mr. Sibley smiled furtively; "he, also, can show a written proof."

"Sibley," said Sir Frederick, trying to be brave, and stand firm in spite of every thing, "I have fully decided that the debt is paid. Don't try to unsettle me. I said it is paid, and it shall be!"

Mr. Sibley paused while he made a few hurried reflections. Then he said, in his old bland way, "But, my dear Sir Frederick, at least you will allow that something is due to me for the trouble I have taken. Who would be a faithful and painstaking servant such as myself, if all his labor was to be thrown away? Where is your gratitude, my dear patron?"

"I am sure you are very good, Sibley, and I am much obliged; but really, do let me have my own way in this matter"—if only for once, Sir Frederick might have added, as he concluded this feeble and injudicious speech—the most injudicious he could have made to Mr. Sibley.

The agent knew his man well, and from that moment he felt the ground under his feet to be firm. He changed from the bullying tone to the caressing.

"Of course! Your own way—why you have it always, my dear sir! It is I who am the servant, you the master."

Sir Frederick smiled. He thought now that all might be settled amicably, and the Ormonds let alone for evermore.

"All I ask of you is this," continued Mr.

Sibley, "to leave the matter in my hands. You may trust me to do justice to all parties, and to settle things in a proper and pleasant manner. Don't you see how implicated I am? I must not have it said that Sir Frederick has drawn back from fear."

"Nobody does say it, Sibley."

"Pardon me, they do. It is the current report in the neighborhood. Luke Ormond repeats it every day of his life."

"I don't believe it!" cried Sir Frederick, indignantly.

"Ah! well. It is a poor reward for my services, to have every body's word taken before mine. I have been long thinking it would be better for me to retire."

"Oh no!" said Sir Frederick, touched in his most sensitive point—the dread of being ungrateful to any living soul;—"oh no! Just explain to me what you wish, Sibley, and I will do the best I can. I have a duty to you, of course, as well as to the Ormonds."

A speech about as injudicious as the last. Sibley knew it, and laughed in his sleeve.

"It is easy to know what to do: have the matter investigated."

"But that has been done, Sibley."

"Pardon me, nothing of the kind; at least, not an open investigation. Now, by so doing, you benefit the Ormonds greatly."

Sir Frederick opened his eyes wide.

"I repeat it—you do. There is a slur upon their character now. The affair has got wind. Some people believe one thing, and some another. Luke Ormond's character will not stand clear any more until this investigation be made."

"I confess I never saw it in that light," said Sir Frederick, glancing, as if for aid and counsel, to Mr. Smith.

But that individual never raised his eyes from the floor.

"I do, though," resumed Sibley; "and Mr. Smith and I are prepared to go through with it. If the debt is fairly proved, much better for Luke Ormond to pay it, and go on his way with a clear conscience."

"How can he pay it, Sibley?"

This was asked fretfully.

"Never do you mind! I know the old man died worth a great deal of money. Besides, you can step forward as a friend, and accommodate them, if they want accommodation. You can hold the farm as security."

"And let them go on living there?"

"Oh, of course, if you choose! They need not be disturbed. Even I, vindictive as you imagine me to be, should not mind advancing them a little of my hard-earned savings. The feud between us might then be arranged as well."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Sibley. I was afraid you were bearing them malice."

"It is the lot of some unhappy persons to be misrepresented," replied Mr. Sibley, with a look of Christian patience and resignation.

Again Sir Frederick glanced at Mr. Smith, but nothing could be gathered from the countenance of that individual. Practically, the battle had been lost. He was again under the control of Sibley.

A little more wheedling and cajolery, a little more dust thrown into the eyes of his master, and Sibley found himself in the coveted position—namely, invested with absolute power and authority.

Sir Frederick, to use his expression, was not to be seen in the business; and the whole matter was to turn out to the decided advantage of the Ormonds, as well as the furtherance of the Morton interest.

Armed with such power, Sibley went out, followed by Mr. Smith.

Sir Frederick was left behind in a state of perplexity and embarrassment. He was not at all sure whether he had done right—whether he had not been giving up the lamb to the tender mercies of the wolf!

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

"Ah, there's no place like home, after all!" said a tidy-looking woman, as she pinned on her shawl in one of the rooms of the hospital. "They've been wonderful kind, all of 'em—God bless 'em for it!—and it's been the saving of me, that I know—the victuals, and the wine, and the nursing; but still it ain't like home, is it?"

The question was addressed to another woman, who was also putting on her shawl, but who made no reply.

"My good man's coming to fetch me," continued the woman, who was of a garrulous turn; "who's coming for you?"

The other woman turned away her head. A girl—there were several persons in the room—a girl, also preparing to leave, whispered to the garrulous speaker, "Hush! Maybe her good man is dead."

The woman turned round to stare at the shabby bonnet, with the bit of widow's cap. It silenced her a moment, but she was not easily checked.

"You might be going my way, happen," she said to the widow, concerning whom she had evinced the keenest curiosity. "Where might you live?"

"Hush!" again said the girl, "don't you see she's crying? Happen she don't live anywhere."

There was another look of curiosity, and then the conversation ended. The garrulous woman's husband had come to fetch her.

The widow had been declared sufficiently convalescent to quit the hospital. She had been brought round, from the extremity of weakness and illness, by the usual care and nursing. There were now other cases, far worse than

her own, which needed attention. There was no disease, the doctor said, only debility; and he had spoken of her removal home as safe and practicable.

Margaret had smiled at the word *home*, but not a word had escaped her lips. No one came to fetch her. The nurse thought she expected some one and lingered on that account. But the widow shook her head. She made no communication on the subject. She had all along been reserved to a degree. No one had elicited from her a single fact.

"I am sorry you are going," said the nurse, kindly; "and Mr. Howard will be so vexed that he happened to be away. He so seldom misses, and he would not now, if it were not for his poor sick sister."

The widow was ready to depart.

"Will you tell Mr. Howard," said she, in a low voice, "that I am deeply grateful for his kindness? I shall never cease to remember it."

"Yes, I will tell him; and if he wants to come and see you," suggested the nurse, "where am I to direct him?"

A flush of color mounted to the pale forehead of the widow.

"It is not very likely," she replied, in the same low tone, and with averted face, "that Mr. Howard would be able to find me."

"But he knows every street and corner in the city; he would be sure to find you."

The widow did not reply. She took up a little bundle, her sole belongings, and having bidden the nurse good-bye, quitted the hospital.

She walked slowly, for she was still weak—more so than she had imagined. Her limbs soon began to totter, and once she stopped to wipe the perspiration from her forehead. Then she crawled feebly onward, resting at intervals. Thus in time she reached the place where she was intending to go.

Was it her home?—was it any kind of shelter or of refuge? Oh, no! It was the place to which she had been accustomed to go for employment. A large shop of ready-made clothes fronted into the street. She entered it, and walked up to a man, who at first did not recognize her.

"Well," said he, after a few minutes' observation, "what did you want, pray?"

"I thought perhaps you would give me some more work."

"Work? Heyday, you are the woman who dropped the shirts in the street, are you? We've got another hand on now."

She still lingered. There was a look of misery in her face which touched him. Still he wanted to be rid of her. It was inconvenient to have her loitering there, and her services were not required. He would give her a shilling, and send her away.

She did not take the shilling. A flush of crimson came into her face when he offered it, but she turned round and quitted the office. He was glad when she was gone. "It was silly

of her," he thought, "not to take the shilling," and he slipped it back into his pocket. After that, he ceased to think about the matter.

The widow began again her slow and feeble progress. The little strength she had gained was not equal to an emergency like this. She soon felt unable to cope with the difficulties

weariness, what painfulness, what despair she had felt! Yet amid all her anguish, one thought flashed across her mind, bringing with it a world of consolation. She raised her eyes to heaven and smiled.

"O God! I thank thee!" she murmured, and for a time some blissful memory seemed to pos-



"WE'VE GOT ANOTHER HAND ON NOW."

that surrounded her. She had never been possessed of the untiring resolution which would have stood her in stead; and time passed, and every hour found her more feeble and more hopeless.

What a day it had been to her! What

sess her. Her pale face brightened, and her eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Yet around her, hemming her in on every side, were the hungry dogs of starvation.

She had no place to go to—no food, no money, no friends. Yet with it all she smiled.

And still she murmured, her soul filled with that happy memory, "O God! I thank thee!"

As she stood with clasped hands, and eyes looking, as it were, into some far-off spot, footsteps approached her. It was getting late, and the street had been partially deserted. She turned her face in the direction of the sound. Another minute, and there passed close by her, touching her very garments, Reuben Howard!

She hoped he would not see her. She wanted to hide her misery, if she could. She wished to go away into some quiet corner, lay her head on the greensward, and die! Yes, there was nothing left for her but to die! No matter. And again that smile, so strangely out of place. No matter! One she loves, with all the fervor of her poor breaking heart, is safe. Yonder, away from this depth of misery, she sees its smiling face. It knows no want, no sorrow! It never will. It has found a better protector than she could ever be. Let her leave it in its happy haven, and quit this weary world, which will not allow her so much as standing-room. There is a better country somewhere, let her lie down and take her rest.

As she thought this, Reuben paused. His quick eye detected her in a moment. He was never likely to pass her by. He addressed her by her name. He spoke to her as Mrs. Seymour, and he raised his hat courteously. He had all along recognized her as a gentlewoman. She started a little when he spoke; but it was very soothing, too, in the midst of this utter isolation, to hear the familiar sound. He looked at her, at the emaciated form, the sunken features, the threadbare clothes. It was a picture of heart-rending distress. He had thought all along there was something of peculiar painfulness in the case. He was glad he had met with her. He would not have lost sight of her for the world.

She was weak and faint; the distressing events of the day had overcome what little bravery was left. She let him lead her away. There was something in the thought of shelter, and food, and protection, which was welcome, after all.

The damp, chill evening was closing round. The place was dreary and deserted. She was no exalted heroine; but simply a woman in distress, and she had a yearning for light and warmth and comfort. He would be her benefactor, this good Samaritan, whose influence had been so soothing and beneficent.

It was a present relief; she had been used, in her desperate struggles, to catch at such things, and for the time almost to rejoice.

He did not lead her far. He was acquainted with the short cuts, and turnings, and windings of that part of the city, better than she was. Very soon he had brought her to the densely populated locality in which lay the sphere of his duties.

There was a court containing a number of houses, shut out in some degree from the noise of the street. He left her a few moments

while he knocked at the door of the first of the houses.

A widow woman opened the door. "Why, dear me, Mr. Howard! and I am glad to see you, sir!" she exclaimed, joyfully; "do come in."

"Not to-night, Mrs. Wills. I will say a word or two, standing here. I have brought you a lodger."

"I am very glad of that, sir, I'm sure. I was getting quite down-hearted. I began to think I should have no luck."

"Luck is not a favorite word of mine," he said gently. "It has a sound with it as though things happened by chance, instead of by the permissive will and care of Providence."

"Well, sir, I meant no harm," replied the woman, simply.

"That I am sure you did not. But we must have a little more talk on the subject another day. The lady is tired, and wants to rest."

"What, is the lodger a lady?"

"Do not let me deceive you, Mrs. Wills. Many persons would call her a poor woman. She is far worse clothed than you are, and I fear has been worse fed. But I am convinced she is a lady born and bred, and I wish her to be treated as such."

"I am sure I'll treat her well, sir. Poor thing! it's hard enough to struggle with poverty, still worse, to come down to it."

"I hope to put her in a way of earning her bread," continued Reuben; "but till then you may look to me for the payment of the rent. Her name is Mrs. Seymour."

"I am sure you are very good, sir. If all the world were like you—"

He did not hear the conclusion of the speech. He had gone to fetch the lodger.

"This good woman," he said, speaking of Mrs. Wills, "is a widow, and will be very glad to receive you. I can leave you in her care with the greatest confidence. I shall call upon you the first opportunity I have."

She was too much exhausted to reply. He had scarce led her into the little kitchen, with its clean hearth and bright fire, than she sank on the nearest chair and fainted.

Mrs. Wills had had plenty of experience during her fifty years' sojourn in this checkered scene. She said to Reuben, who was alarmed and perplexed,

"There, sir, go your ways! She's dead beat, that's what she is. I'll soon bring her round;" and opening the door, she let him out without further ceremony. "Menkind are mostly in the way," she muttered to herself, "when any thing wants doing."

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### SHE MIGHT REVEAL THE SECRET.

It was a week before Reuben was able to call again in Cramp's Court, which was the name of the retreat where Mrs. Wills lived. When at



length he did so, the good woman herself opened the door.

"Well, Mrs. Wills," said Reuben, kindly, "and how is your lodger?"

"Come in, sir—come in! I'm glad enough to see you, sir," and she dusted a chair for him, and placed it by the fire. "I began to think you very long."

"My time is not always my own, Mrs. Wills. But how is the lady? I see she is not here," said Reuben, glancing round.

"No, sir! and it's my opinion, and so it is the doctor's, for I made bold to send for him, I being a lone woman, and she, poor thing, having neither kith nor kin, that I could make out—it's my opinion, sir, she's breaking up fast. In fact, she's quite wore out, that's what she is!"

"You think so, do you?" said Reuben, in a tone of anxiety.

"I do indeed, sir. When such as her come to knock about in the world, it isn't like us, who can rough it, and hold our own against any body. No! she isn't of that class, sir. She is a lady born. You were right there."

"And what does the doctor say?"

"He said pretty much as I did, only he put it in finer words. He said I was to keep her as quiet as I could; but she won't be quiet. The worst of it is, she is getting so lightheaded. She sits up in bed making believe to stitch; she thinks she is working for her bread; and she talks so wildly that I am sometimes quite frightened."

"Does she mention any names?" asked Reuben, quickly.

"Yes, sir; but she talks so quick that I can't make any thing out. There is one place she talks about, East—East—East—something. I'm sure I can't remember."

"I will go up stairs and see her," said Reuben again, quickly.

If he could only get some clue, that was what he wanted. He felt sure she had friends, able if not willing to support her, if once he could ascertain the fact.

She was sitting up in bed, as Mrs. Wills had told him, stitching as for her life. There was a flush on her cheek, and her eyes were bright and restless. He could see the golden hair, one long tress drooped on her shoulder.

Her busy fingers did not stop when he came in, though she gave him a friendly nod, and a glance of recognition from the wild, bright eyes.

"You must excuse me," she said, hurriedly; "I have so much to do. I must stitch—stitch—stitch. Sit down, will you? I don't receive company here; but in your case I don't mind. You must not tell," continued she, putting her finger to her lip. "I would not have them know for the world. It might damage—"

She stopped. Then she looked at him, with a more rational expression.

"Dear me! it is Mr. Howard. How are you, sir? I am so glad!" and she sank back from sheer exhaustion.

"This is how she goes on all day, and half the night," said Mrs. Wills, tearfully, as she put a stimulant to the pale lips. "It's enough to wring one's heart."

The stimulant revived her. She lifted up her head with a quick, eager gesture.

"Give me the work! Where is it? Quick, quick! I might fall in the street again. It was very disgraceful, considering that my name—"

"Is Seymour," suggested Reuben.

"No, no! I don't mean that name, I mean the other."

"Your maiden name. What was it?"

She looked at him with a sharp, cunning expression. Then she laughed.

"I never tell that," she said, as her fingers resumed their useless task. "They made me promise to keep away. I should not have troubled them either. What a long time it is!" and she sighed wearily. "But, no matter. I saw her last night, as plainly as I see you. I shall see her again to-night. She is sure to come; God bless her! They can not prevent that!"

Reuben's face was thoughtful and distressed. He listened eagerly, in hopes of catching some random speech which might throw light upon the darkness. Mrs. Wills had turned her face to the wall, and was silently weeping.

As if possessed with the idea, and drawn away by it from all present scenes, the woman ceased the play of her thin, wasted fingers. Her eye was fixed on vacancy, as though she beheld some dear and familiar object.

"Ah!" cried she, "did you ever see such a bonny face? Did you ever see such silken hair? They say my eyes were as blue as that, and my hair as golden. I know she is alive, you need not say a word to the contrary. She is alive, or she would not come as she does, night after night, and say pretty things to me! and let me feel her little hands, and whisper, 'Mother—mother!'"

"Then it is your child?" said Reuben, quickly.

She turned to him with another cunning look. The speech had been indiscreet. It had recalled her to herself.

"Pick up my work," said she, with a change of voice. "It is cruel to hinder me; I have nothing to depend upon but my fingers."

He tried to recover the broken thread, but it was useless. Her incoherent ramblings ended in nothing.

He got up to depart; he would come again, he thought, and again, and again—that is, till the end. Well, let the worst happen, she was housed and cared for. Let the worst happen, kind hands would close her eyes. He thought it could not last long. The feeble fingers would cease their restless movement. The brain would cease to wander. In the dread calm that precedes the soul's last journey there might be a lucid interval. She might reveal the secret. She might tell him what to do; till then he must remain content.

He was walking home, and had reached the end of the street when footsteps came hurrying after him.

"Mr. Howard, will you stop, sir? Will you stop just a moment?"

It was Mrs. Wills who spoke; her bonnet barely set on her head, her shawl streaming in the wind.

He stopped, and she came up panting and breathless. For a second or two she could not speak.

"Oh," said she, at length, "I must not stop a minute! I've left the door on the latch. But the name has all at once popped into my head."

"What name—whose?" asked Reuben, eagerly.

"The name the lady said in the night. I was so afraid I should forget it, that I've runned all down the street to catch you, sir. The name is East Bramley."

He took out his pocket-book and wrote it down.

"Thank you, Mrs. Wills; I am very glad that you have remembered it. And now pray go back to your patient."

"Do you happen to know any such place, sir?"

"I think I do," replied Reuben, thoughtfully. And he went away, repeating to himself the words as if he would impress them on his mind, "East Bramley."

## CHAPTER L.

### "OVER HEAD AND EARS IN DEBT."

"I DON'T wonder at her being slack of coming," said Juliet's mother, in a dissatisfied tone, "what with the smallness of the house, and the noise of the children, and her being used to that grandeur, I only wonder she comes at all."

"I am ashamed of you, Gertrude! as if she ever was slack!" replied her husband, "when you know she is as regular as clockwork, bless her! And has never once looked down upon us since she went to Beech Grove; no, nor ever will while her name is Juliet."

"I am sure she has a nice easy life of it, that I know," grumbled the wife, as she sat down before the fire, on which the kettle was boiling merrily for tea. "I wish I'd been born with such a silver spoon in my mouth."

"For shame, Gertrude; are you envious of your own daughter?"

"No, I'm not," replied Gertrude, turning angrily towards him, "I'm not jealous of any body; I only know there's not a lady in the whole country slaves as I do; with a husband who can't stir from his chair from January to December, and seven children to be fed, and clothed, and have their schooling, it's enough to spoil the sweetest temper that is!"

"I am sorry I am a burden to you, my dear," said her husband.

"You! I never said you were," she replied, with a little gush of petulant tears; "I only know that Willy's boots are worn out, and the girls' frocks are quite shabby, and with all my mending and stitching, I can't keep things together; and the rent is overdue a quarter, and every place about the house is going to rack and ruin as fast as it can!"

"Come, come, my dear; don't rake up our troubles on Juliet's day. You forget Juliet is coming."

She dried her eyes, and there was a perceptible gleam of satisfaction in her face, but she took care not to express it.

"Ah, yes, she may come! It is easy times for her. To have been taken up, and adopted, and made a fine lady of, while her poor mother struggles on as she can."

Squire Masterman was in the right of it, Gertrude. He had a host of needy relations to choose from, and he chose the flower of them all. He could not do as much for all of us."

"Nobody expected him," said she, sharply; "but he might have known how it would be when that affliction came, and he might have allowed—"

"And so he does allow; you forget you are only his step-daughter, and that Juliet is no relation to him at all, though she has taken the name of Masterman; and what he does for her is magnificent," and the father's face kindled at the thought. "Why, the girl treads on velvet!"

"Ah, so she does! I don't dispute that. I was only thinking what *we* trod upon!"

"Come, come, Gertrude! cheer up, wife! I tell you it's a holiday to-day. Hark!"

A noise as of Bedlam let loose—a pattering of little feet, a chattering and screaming of eager voices—a general and vehement rush to the front door.

"Hark!" continued he, his face relaxing into as pleasant a smile as you need wish to see; "that's Juliet!"

Even the mother smiled. Every body and every thing did always smile on Juliet.

A minute after, and you would hardly have known the room to be the same. It had looked dingy and poverty-stricken, and lacked any element of cheerfulness. Now into it, surrounded by a crowd of little rebels struggling for her first kiss, fighting which should get nearest to her, came Juliet.

Her dress, her whole appearance, formed a contrast to every thing about her. It brought a warmth of color, a richness, a gladness, where all had been so pinched and bare. When she took off her hat, and laughingly shook the mass of glossy curls that fell almost to her waist, the effect was fascinating.

The best of it was, she never thought about her beauty, or seemed even conscious of it. She had been fortunate beyond measure. The squire had taken her, when quite a child, from the noisy, crowded house in which so many cares had their abode, and had transplanted her to Beech Grove.



Half a mile from here stands the fine old English mansion, with its park and its shady trees and its pleasant nooks. She is a kind of empress there; her will is law. People say she is spoilt; but looking into her open face, so bright, so beautiful, we are inclined to repel the aspersion; we feel nature has given her a kind of

ily festival when Juliet came home—not that, as far as the wife was concerned, she enlivened it with her cheerfulness. It had been better for her if she had.

"Gertrude Wilmot is like a perpetual drizzle on a November day," was said of her by Squire Masterman; and, being an eccentric



EVERY BODY AND EVERY THING DID ALWAYS SMILE ON JULIET.

privilege to reign. Are not some women born with a sceptre?

All this time her father is eager to embrace her. These days are what help him to live.

His wife pretended to be absorbed in the duties of preparing the tea. It was a kind of fam-

man, the measure of his benevolence was stinted to her in consequence.

When tea was over, and the little rebels, after much resistance, dismissed to have a romp in the kitchen, a feeling of quietude fell on the room. Juliet sat close by her father, her arm

round him, her beautiful head resting on his shoulder. She had something she wanted to say, now the children were gone.

The consciousness of this something had made her, not embarrassed, that she never was, but preoccupied. She had been more silent than usual—a circumstance which Mrs. Wilmot set down to her favorite theory, that Juliet was getting "slack of coming."

All at once Juliet said, very quietly, and without raising her head or varying the tones of her voice, "I think I am going to be married."

Mrs. Wilmot turned from the corner cupboard into which she was about to restore the best teapot. "Married!" repeated she, fearfully; the word being associated in her mind with the beginning of troubles; "not to a poor man, I hope, Juliet."

The words had slipped from her unawares. It was just what she had done herself; what, perhaps, she would do again, if the time could ever return when the poor paralytic yonder were to stand before her, as he did stand once, in his manly pride and beauty—if he were to say, as indeed he did say, "We will marry for love, Gertrude, and then I can work for money."

Ah! he had worked for a time—till the strong arm and the stout frame had been laid low. And what came then?

This made her say, with that sudden anxiety, "Not to a poor man, Juliet."

Juliet did not raise her head. She was clinging close to her father.

No, she said, in the same quiet voice; she was hardly likely to do any thing so foolish. She had seen quite enough of poverty.

"I am glad of that, Juliet. I think if people did but know," began the mother, getting rapidly into the old strain.

But the father interrupted her. He wanted to hear who the future husband of Juliet was. His own ideas were rather exalted. He thought a prince might have been proud of her.

"You know him quite well, father. I don't mind telling his name," and she neither blushed nor hesitated: "it is as honest a one as any in the county. It is Luke Ormond."

"Oh, only Luke," said her mother, disappointed.

Her father was silent. He had been conjuring up visionary husbands, all of whom were higher in the social scale than Luke.

Nobody could be too high for Juliet! They were fond, foolish people, both of them, but they were her parents!

Juliet's thoughts did not follow theirs in the least. She might have had a husband with a title, if she had chosen; but he was an empty-headed coxcomb, and she did not choose. She would never marry, she said, a man without brains, or a man without money. She had seen enough of poverty, with all its accompaniments. "I could not scrape and pinch as they do," she had said, meaning her parents.

And as she sat, her head still resting on her father's shoulder, she smiled softly to herself. Luke, she thought, had brains and money too!

He had not told her a word of his late embarrassment—about the debt. Not the slightest report of it had reached her ear. He had offered himself to her as a prosperous and well-to-do man, who could insure her the same comforts and luxuries she now possessed. She did not care personally about luxuries.

"But if one does love, one may as well love a rich man as a poor one," she had said, not long ago, to Kate Ormond.

And Squire Masterman had been accustomed to declare that unless she could have the afore-said comforts, she should never marry at all. He was barely tolerant of Luke Ormond. Indeed, the consent had to be wrung from him.

Now, as it happened, through the great industry of Mr. Sibley, the report of the debt was being sown broadcast over the county. As a natural consequence, Juliet's father had that very day heard of it. It had not occurred to him all at once, for Juliet's confession had been a surprise; but when he had returned from his career amid his visionary sons-in-law, the fact lay just in his path, with all its native ugliness.

"Why, Juliet, he is head over ears in debt."

"Debt!" She said it sharply, and raised herself up with frightened eyes—"debt!"

"Yes, my dear, every one is talking of it. He owes Sir Frederick Morton a very large sum indeed."

She did not speak. Her face had a sharp angry look: a look, too, of keen vexation.

Her father went on. He was not so sorry as he ought to have been. His ambition might perhaps recover from its wound at the expense of Luke Ormond.

"Yes," continued he, "and they say he is going to be sued for it, and his farm seized. Why, Juliet, you would not surely throw yourself away on a ruined man!"

She looked pale, but still angry. She was very angry indeed in her heart. Had Luke deceived her? Had he, knowing her dread of these evils, led her straight into the midst of them? She knew what embarrassment meant: witness this poor scant home, where it was ever a struggle to live. She had done what she could for her parents. She had shared with them as much as she dared of the good things bestowed on her; but the bread thus eaten must be bitter, she thought. It would be so to her. She was dependent, after all, on the old man's bounty. She knew he meant to provide handsomely for her. But was the provision to be swallowed up in the very beginning—the farm seized for debt—the home where she was to be installed as a happy bride?

Her father must have taken up some idle, mischievous report; not a word of it could be true. At any rate, she would search to the bottom of it before many hours were over. Luke was coming to fetch her. She begged both her father and mother would be silent on the sub-

ject. On the way home she would ask him plainly, and acquaint herself with the whole story. Till then she should dismiss it as a mere absurdity. And so saying, she rose up to have her periodical game with the children in the kitchen.

Any one, to hear her merry laugh, and see her bright face, would have thought that all had been forgotten—that no trace of care could ever be found in the breast of Juliet. Her parents felt sure of it.

"Whichever way it turns out, will be all the same to her!" said they.

## CHAPTER LI.

### "AGAIN THAT NAME!"

THE hour came at last for Luke to present himself, and for Juliet to return home. Luke, beaming with delight, had not the slightest suspicion that the subject so obnoxious to him had been broached. It was the first time he had been allowed to escort her as her acknowledged lover, and he was in excellent spirits. He thought himself the luckiest fellow in the world.

It was only a short walk from Beech Grove to the little red-brick house in which Juliet's parents lived; but Luke, leisurely at all times, was certainly not disposed to hurry now. This walk was the rare bit of felicity he had been hankering after the whole day long. He was fast losing his habitual stolidity; love had quickened his faculties amazingly.

The first thing he did was to try and obtain possession of Juliet's hand. But she did not seem in quite so loving a mood as he was. She had always been what he called rather "high and mighty" with him. But, now the engagement had begun in earnest, he hoped she would descend a little from her dignity. She had done so in the blissful interview he had with her yesterday; now she was quite on the stilts again.

He was beginning to remonstrate with her, when she cut him very short indeed.

"How is it you have deceived me in the matter of that debt?"

Ill-omened word! It made him change color for the moment, but he recovered instantly. He wondered who had been so mischievous as to tell her.

"My own father," she replied, shortly.

He changed color again; but again all anxiety was dismissed. The matter had been settled, he told her; that was why he had not troubled her with it. Had it been in existence, he should never have ventured—

And again he tried to approach her.

But not yet. Juliet was only half satisfied.

He had to tell her the whole story, from beginning to end. He had to explain and to assuage. In his own mind he felt perfectly secure. It was in good faith when he said, "We

shall hear not one syllable more about it, Juliet. Come, Juliet—Juliet!"

Gradually she relented—very gradually, indeed. When she did relent, there came that bit of rare felicity which Luke had been bargaining for. Though sweet as honey, it could not well be shorter. The cloud had but just passed when the gates of Beech Grove appeared in sight.

Still, she was very bewitching. Her last look, the one that beamed upon him as she bade him farewell—not one, but both her hands in his grasp—repaid him for all. He walked home, sunning himself in the memory of it.

It was getting dusk; but in the glimmering twilight he could perceive a little figure flitting to and fro as he approached the garden gate. What on earth could it be? He had barely time to conjecture when there darted upon him his sister Kate.

She had a shawl over her head, and had been watching for him. Her hand, when he touched it, felt as cold as ice. She shivered, and her teeth chattered. There was something strange about her altogether.

"Kate! Kate! what are you doing?"

"I am waiting for you, Luke."

"You need not have done that, my dear. How cold you are!"

"Come in, Luke; don't stay talking there!" said she, sharply; "come in."

"I will, when I have fastened the gate. This lock goes so rusty," said Luke, pottering over it, without hurrying in the least.

She gave an impatient movement.

"How slow you are!" she said angrily.

"Coming, my dear," and he turned to follow her. "The next time the locksmith is here he shall see to that gate. Good gracious, Kate!"

They had entered the house, and she had dropped her shawl. A face white as marble, and two despairing eyes, met his view. He was startled beyond measure.

He could not imagine what was the matter. There was one comfort: it could be nothing about Mr. Sibley. Some one had put Kate in a passion. Well, he must hear all about it. He wished she were not such a little vixen! She would be frightening Juliet to death some of these days.

"What is it, Kate?" he said, his mind going back, after the first alarm, to that beaming look of his beloved's; "what is it, my sister?"

"It is this, Luke," and she came up to him, and laid hold of his arm: "that we are, both of us, ruined!"

"Ruined, my dear! How—how?"

"By Mr. Sibley."

Again that name! Was it never to cease? Was the spirit of evil to rise again and yet again? Would nothing lay it to rest—nothing?

"But, Kate," he began in a bewildered tone, "when Sir Frederick—"

"I know—I know!" she cried, impatiently; "but we trusted to a broken reed. He has



gone, and left us to the tender mercies of Mr. Sibley."

"Gone where? I wish you would be more explicit, Kate."

"How should I know?" said she, scoffingly; "anywhere—to any place where his master has chosen to send him!"

thing," said Luke, anxiously. "Sit down, my dear, and compose yourself. Now just tell me what has happened."

"This has happened," she replied in a firm but suppressed voice: "Sir Frederick has changed his mind"—and she gave a little scornful laugh—"or Mr. Sibley has been too



"WE ARE, BOTH OF US, RUINED!"

"But how do you know?"

"Why do you irritate me by questions? I do know. I have been to ask."

"To the Tower?"

"Yes; to the Tower."

"Kate, if you love me, you will explain this

strong for him. He is going to seize the farm for the debt."

"But how can he, when the proof has been destroyed?"

"That letter was not the only proof. A witness has come forward who can swear to its non-

payment, and also produce a written attestation of the same. That is *their* version. That is the web in which they have entangled us."

"Who is the witness?"

"A person of the name of Smith. He has been here with Mr. Sibley."

"Sibley always comes when I am out, the cowardly rascal!" exclaimed Luke, grinding his teeth.

"They give you seven days in which to produce the money; after that, proceedings will be taken against you. Luke," added she, earnestly, "if it must be so, let us contend no further. Let us pay the debt, if it takes our last farthing."

"What! and be beggared?"

"We shall be beggared all ways!" said she, bursting into tears.

"And when it has been paid already—when we shall give the lie to our dear father's testimony, and contradict ourselves! Never, Kate! never!"

She was sobbing piteously. She was but a woman, after all; and she had just brought her domestic toils to such a happy termination. The house ready for the bride—Juliet coming—the brightest days in store for them—and now all was to be destroyed in an hour; all through the malice and vindictiveness of Mr. Sibley!

Luke had seized his hat, but he laid it down again.

"You say he is out. It is of no use going to the Tower. I could not have believed it of him. I can't imagine what we are to do!"

For the first time Kate made no suggestion. The nearness of the ruin appalled her.

"I can't imagine what we are to do," he repeated, as he strode up and down the room. "Whichever way I look is utter destruction!"

Kate still made no reply. Even her ready wit was silenced. It was a fearful crisis to which their affairs had come. Whichever way she looked was utter destruction!

## CHAPTER LII.

### IT WAS NOTHING SHORT OF IDOLATRY.

Joy is, after all, one of the great medicines of life—and joy had set in, like a full tide, to the heart of Amy. Her physical powers revived, like the parched ground after a summer shower. She began to recover with a speed that surpassed Reuben's expectations. He could scarcely believe it possible.

He dared not leave her. He felt it was imperative upon him at this juncture to be more than ever watchful over her; she would pass into another's care and keeping soon. His heart clung to her with unusual fondness. He was altogether softened, and, as Amy said, laughingly, more pliable. How it did him good to hear her laugh once more!

The time slipped by more pleasantly than he

could have believed. He—stern and grave as he was—could not hold out to the end against the varied blandishments of Sidney; and there was something, after all, of abstract bliss in the simple word *holiday*. He had not had one for years; he never might have one again. This had been forced upon him without his asking; but, say what he would, to his over-taxed heart and brain it was welcome—nay, more, it was sweet.

These delicious balmy days—for the weather was enchanting—the rambles along the beach, listening to the soft music of the waves; the fresh, invigorating air; the rest, the quiet, the absence from care; the interval of leisure for studies and meditations that he loved—all this made up a brief period of enjoyment that came to him in the immediate path of duty, and which he dared to indulge.

Like all other joys, it was fleeting fast away. But a few days remained, and the visit to Cliff Bridge would be ended. Amy would have sufficiently recovered to return home. What the next step would be, puzzled him to think.

Other minds had been busy on the subject as well.

He was poring over one of his favorite volumes, when Amy came stealing into the room. He thought that she had gone upon the beach with Sidney. He glanced to the door mechanically. He expected Sidney to follow her—the lovers were inseparable in these days—but, as it happened, he was mistaken.

"No, dear; he is not coming, just this minute. See what he has given me"—and she displayed a splendid pair of ear-rings—"are they not beautiful?"

"Yes, very."

"I have never had such a present in my life, have I, Reuben?"

"Ornaments have not been much in our way, Amy."

She was silent a moment. Reuben, having given a cursory glance at the trinket, was about to resume his reading. Nothing of that sort interested him in the least.

Amy lingered. She evidently had more to say.

"It may not be so always, Reuben. The time may come when I shall be quite a lady."

"I hope you are that now, Amy."

"Yes, but—How dull you are, Reuben!"

She paused, and came near to him, with crimson cheek and eye sparkling with excitement.

"Sidney thinks—Sidney says—"

"Well?" asked Reuben, attentively, and in a tone of interest.

"He thinks that we had better be married at once."

"What! now?"

He spoke with a feeling of vague alarm. There seemed something premature in the proposal. His ideas did not keep pace with the winged speed of love. He was thinking of an interval when Sidney should have arranged his

affairs, and Amy's health be quite established; when—he felt rather uneasy on this point—Sidney's mother should have been consulted. From speeches dropped by Sidney, her ladyship was altogether in the dark.

"Has Sidney written to Lady Peters?" was the next question he asked.

"He is writing now."

Reuben was silent. In spite of all Sidney's blandishments, in spite of his gratitude at Amy's recovery, in spite of his late delights, there was a smothered feeling of uneasiness, now the matter had come to the point—now that he could see the specks and flaws in it more clearly.

Amy came close to him, and hid her face on his shoulder. She was violently agitated.

"Reuben, if he leaves me again I can not bear it. It will kill me. My very life depends on his being with me always—always," added she, wildly, almost, as ever.

Reuben was increasingly grave. It was clear to him that this passionate, vehement love was nothing short of idolatry. Thank Heaven, he knew nothing of it—that into these dangerous and stormy passages he had never come. It would not do for one with his great mission thus to be entangled and swallowed up! How should he deal with Amy? Her strength would soon be unknit if she were to tremble so—if the agitation were to last. He hastened to calm it.

"When Sidney has heard from his mother, we will talk the matter over."

"You are so cold, Reuben, so apathetic," she cried, impulsively. "Suppose he *does* hear, and suppose she forbids the marriage—what then?"

"It will be time to discuss the point when it presents itself, Amy."

"Yes, and I am to die!—die of suspense and agony! If he is torn from me again, I shall lose my reason. I will not let him go, Reuben! I will follow him all over the world! I will leave every thing for him—every thing!"

He felt stung by the recklessness of the speech. Had not he been better to her than Sidney? Was he not, even now, more her friend? His hand shook, as he put the marker in his volume and closed it.

"You talk so wildly, Amy, it pains me to hear you. What are you intending to do?"

She brushed away the hot, passionate tears, and spoke more calmly.

"Sidney thinks he must go to East Bramley, and get to work at his profession. He is going to practise as a lawyer."

"Only going—not actually practising, then, Amy?"

"What does that matter," cried she impatiently, "when he is sure to succeed in every thing?"

Reuben was again silent. The thing was not in accordance with his views. A hasty marriage, unknown to Sidney's relatives, was not strictly honorable. He did not feel that he could lend himself to it. He thought Sidney's mother ought to be told. He would go himself, he said, and lay the matter before her.

If she had a motherly and Christian heart, she would not refuse her sympathy. From which speech it might be inferred that Lady Peters was personally a stranger to Reuben.

This was just the thing Amy dreaded the most.

"Oh no, no!" cried she, in a voice of keen alarm; "we will wait, Reuben—we will do any thing rather than that!"

She was sorry she had spoken. It was always so with Reuben. None of the devious paths which humanity is so ready to adopt found favor with him. At whatever cost, he would avoid every one of them.

The way he chose was too high, too steep, too rugged for her. It was easier by far to slip back to Sidney.

Reuben had said it was idolatry. This man stood to her in the place of God.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### SIDNEY'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER.

LADY PETERS had come down to her late breakfast; the postman had been long since, and a number of letters lay upon the table. Her ladyship carelessly glanced at one after the other.

She had a vast number of correspondents. It was part of her policy to keep up as many friends and acquaintances as she could. Besides, a large correspondence gave her an air of importance. Well, there was nothing very interesting this morning. An invitation to dinner, a dressmaker's bill, a begging letter from somebody down in Dorsetshire, that was about all.

Stay, there is a letter from Sidney. That will keep until she has taken her first sip of chocolate.

"Sidney has been so unlucky," she thought, as she poured out her favorite beverage. "And want of luck is a positive crime."

What was to be done with him remained to be seen. With all his accomplishments, and the gifts nature had bestowed upon him, he had made no way in the world. He was a refined specimen of pauperism, if the matter had to be put in plain English.

He must come back, of course, and set to work at his profession. He would still have a home at the Tower—still be a hanger-on upon his cousin, her ladyship might have added. At any rate, she dared not let him drift from this safe mooring at present. And what would poor dear Frederick do without his relatives to keep him company? The obligation was really as much on one side as the other.

She must look out for another wife for Sidney—a lady with money, and with position. These were the essential points. Her ladyship was not particular about the rest.

After all, it might not be so very difficult, considering Sidney's extreme popularity and

his varied arts of pleasing. And they need not indulge in endless regrets. The Eastons were far below the Peters family in status. Only wealth had raised them to any kind of level. She thought she might find a more suitable daughter-in-law than Adela. She will write by the next post and order Sidney back; of course he will come, with his usual submission to her will and authority. And suppose, in the mean time, she reads his letter.

Leaning back in her chair, she proceeds to do so.

It was a confidential letter, and had been written over and over again ere Sidney could bring his mind to send it. Never had such a difficult task been imposed upon him. The burden of the letter was Amy.

As her ladyship reads it, her countenance changes to all kinds of expressions. First to surprise, then to incredulity, then to rage.

"What!" and she reads it again, and yet again. "What! Amy—Amy Howard—the humble companion, the drudge, the seamstress, who mends her ladyship's gloves!" She gave a derisive laugh. "*That girl!*" Why, Sidney had taken leave of his senses! Disappointment had turned his brain!"

"A long attachment; the girl on the brink of the grave; honor, manliness, in duty bound!"

"I wonder where he picked up that expression. There is something in the idea simply ridiculous!" and she gave another laugh.

The thing had come upon her suddenly, and without a moment's notice. She must collect her energies, and think what is to be done. Of course it must be crushed at once and forever.

"A broken heart, indeed! Let it break! who cares?"

There is nothing so easy, after all, as to put an end to the matter. The mere sight of her will do that. It will strike a wholesome terror into Sidney, and bring him into his right mind. He has never dared openly to defy his mother.

"Where is the place he is staying at?"

Cliff Bridge, of course. What folly to have let him go alone! If by any chance Sidney could mar his own destiny, he never failed to do it.

She must go to Cliff Bridge herself. When? It would not be wise to put it off. Suppose she went at once—this very day.

She finished her breakfast, and began to pick out the trains. There was one which left East Bramley at two o'clock. Perhaps she might be able to catch it.

It was not necessary for poor dear Frederick to know any thing of her movements. A verbal message for him would be enough.

In an incredibly short time her ladyship was on her way to the station. She was sumptuously attired. On whatever errand, whether of life or death, Lady Peters would never be unmindful of her toilet. To produce an effect was the end and object of her existence. By degrees her face relaxed from its sternness. She felt more and more convinced that the plan she had

adopted would be successful—that it would be an easy matter to manage Sidney.

She knew what she meant to say to him. She would offer him his choice—herself or Amy? If he were to choose Amy, it would be at his peril; his mother would be lost to him forever!

Of course he would know better what was his interest. With his mother would go position, ease, and all that he prized the most. Amy could easily be disposed of. And a dark expression lurked about the corners of her mouth. It was a pity she could not be shut up in a convent!

She was very glad when her journey was at an end. She was feverishly impatient to reach Cliff Bridge, and, with all the power of her influence, to bear down on Sidney.

It was no great distance, and she had taken time by the forelock. She could get Sidney away, and be back at the Tower before night. She would have no indecision, or foolish tampering with the evil; she knew how to manage all that. As soon as the train stopped, she got into a cab and drove, as fast as a double fare could instigate the driver, to the house where Sidney lodged. Her face wore a menacing expression. She would rather follow him to his grave than see him married to Amy Howard!

"Is Mr. Peters at home?" she asked, as she alighted. She did not intend to send in her card. Sidney was fertile in expedients. He might contrive to evade her, if time were permitted him.

He *was* at home. Well, there was something in that to be thankful for. She wished to drive him into a corner, and catch him in the very act of disobedience. It would rejoice her heart so to do.

Hush! Some one is coming! The folding-doors open slowly and, as it were, reluctantly. In came Sidney.

Yes, he had better come. He must be aware there was no alternative. She looked full into his face, and burst into a contemptuous laugh. She meant to punish him, now she had him in her power.

He was very pale, but quite calm and self-possessed—more so than she expected. The laugh, mocking as it was, did not seem to irritate him. He placed his mother a chair, and remained standing.

She did not take the chair. She asked him if he were ready to return to the Tower. She was sorry, she said, to cut short his enjoyments—very sorry indeed. And her lip curled with a contemptuous expression meant to wound him.

Then she told him. She put the matter before him. She said on what terms he might stay: that if he chose Amy, he lost her forever. It mattered little to her what steps he took when she was gone. She would have no part or lot in him again.

Still, he did not offer to return with her. He



could not, he said, and there was a curious expression in his face, half of regret and half of defiance. He had other responsibilities, other ties. He had been intending to inform his mother of what had happened, but she had given him no time. He hoped she would deal kindly and leniently towards himself and towards Amy.

He brought the word out with timidity and hesitation. The old rule was still dominant over him. He was still in bondage to his mother.

Her heart failed her, and yet she grasped his arm with a fierceness which made him tremble.

What did he mean by linking his name with that *girl's*?

She could not force herself to utter the name she despised so bitterly—the name of Amy.

“Because”—and the spirit of the man was roused to a kind of bravery—“because she is my wife.”

She picked up her cambric handkerchief—it had dropped on the floor—and went away.

He heard her descend the stairs, he heard the rattle of the cab down the street, and he felt a sensation of keen desolation.

## CHAPTER LIV.

### REUBEN'S PRESENT.

SIDNEY was standing with a look of dismay upon his face, and uncertain whether to follow her, or what step to take, when the folding-doors again slowly opened. Forth stepped Amy.

She came with a timid, frightened air, and glanced fearfully round.

“Is she gone, Sidney? Oh, I am so glad!”

He turned his face to her, still with the same look of dismay upon it. Her words jarred upon him.

He let her cling to him a few minutes. He knew that his love was shallow and trivial, compared to hers—that his remorse would soon have died out, had he gone away to other scenes. But his impulsive, volatile nature had been vehemently wrought upon. His feelings had not the depth Reuben thought they had, but yet they had led him, in a moment of impulse, to link himself for life to Amy Howard.

Her illness, her weakness called out so much of his tenderness; her passionate and clinging love had appealed to him not in vain. He had said to himself that he should be a villain and a scoundrel if he left her again—that he was in *duty bound*.

He could see that the mere mention of his departure caused her the keenest agony. He was touched by the pale cheek and restless anxious eye; she was still feeble; the least shock might undo all. He must go back to East Bramley. Let him take her with him as his wife.

“Pray do not allude to such a thing before

Reuben,” she had said; for since that slight conversation with her brother she had hushed up the matter, as far as he was concerned. She dreaded lest he might throw any impediment in the way. Her all was risked on this. As to what should come after, she was reckless.

In all this Amy was not wise. At this very moment Reuben knew not what had happened. He had been obliged to go home, on urgent business connected with his parish. The lovers were to follow.

Yes, and they would follow. Every arrangement had been made to that effect; but ere they did so they were married.

Sidney's interview with his mother had staggered him. He was like a child in the ordinary business of life, and he had been cherishing a fallacious idea that he could take Amy to the Tower.

Any number of pensioners might live on the bounty of poor dear Frederick. His beneficence was supposed to know no bounds.

Not Sir Frederick, but her ladyship, blocked the way. Her ladyship was the true mistress of the Tower.

He and Amy were to leave Cliff Bridge that afternoon. They were to go direct to the city where Reuben lived. Reuben was expecting his sister home.

She was glad he did not meet them at the station. She knew, if it had been possible, he would have done so. But his engagements were numerous and unceasing; his time was never his own.

His room was all in order for her. He had been expecting her, the woman of the house told her, all the day. He had met one train, and come back disappointed. Well, to be sure! Miss Howard was looking better. The sea-air had set her up!

“Amy,” said Sidney, when they were alone, “I am going a turn in the town. You are the proper person to have it out with Reuben.”

“Have it out? Have *what* out, Sidney?”

“Well, you see he may be angry, and think himself slighted. I don't like to go through any thing unpleasant. I will come back when you have made all smooth.”

“Oh, Sidney! don't go; do stay with me!”

“I can't, Amy. No, don't hinder me;” for she had put her arms round him. “I want to inquire about the trains, and see if there's a decent inn in the place. I don't suppose we can get on till to-morrow.”

Amy loosed her hold directly. When he was gone, she sat down, her hands folded on her lap. She was rather in a flutter when she thought what Reuben would say. The incipient selfishness of Sidney's tactics did not strike her.

Presently there came the well-known step by the window. That was Reuben.

“Why, Amy! I thought you so long; and by yourself, too. Where is Sidney?”

These were his first words to her.

“He is gone to look about him, Reuben.”

"I hope he won't lose his way. Has he ever been angry before?"

"I don't know. I—"

Then, gathering up her courage, she went to her brother.

"Reuben, I want to tell you. Pray don't be angry, dear, because we could not take your advice; we did it for the best: Sidney and I are married."

He looked startled for the moment, and very much pained. It made the tears come into her eyes to think how they had wounded him.

He was softened to her when he saw the tears, and began to wipe them away; the secrecy of the transaction had vexed and hurt him. It was clear that no good would come of it. "Whatever Sidney does," he had said, "let him be open as the day." That is, as far as his relatives were concerned. But the mischief had been done, it seemed, and reproach was useless now; besides, he did not wish Amy's married life to commence with weeping. Now the parting was so near at hand, Amy clung to her brother with unusual fondness. It occurred to her at intervals to appreciate the blessing of a friend like Reuben.

She was unworthy of him; she had known that all along. He would go on his way, toiling up that rugged height, until it ended in glory.

What would she do? Ah! that was the difference. She was choosing her portion here. Her heart was below, in this smooth flowery path, with Sidney.

The interview was beginning to assume a more serious character. Brother and sister knew not where they might meet again. She was going away from him, beyond his control or influence.

He had intended to make her a present before she went away. It lay there ready. It was a handsomely bound Bible.

She was softened, and her spirit chastened, by this farewell interview with Reuben. She took the sacred volume reverently.

"Promise me, Amy, that you will never miss reading a portion day by day. If not for your own sake, dear, promise it for mine."

"I will promise," she said, tearfully.

"And, Amy, whatever happens to you, you will find some word of counsel or of sympathy there. In sorrow it will cheer you, in joy it will impart fresh gladness. Take it to your heart in faith and humility. It will guide you through this troublesome world until we shall meet again yonder."

She was touched more than ever. He had unconsciously led her to breathe a purer and holier atmosphere. He had made apparent to her a solid and substantial bliss after which the soul of man might well hunger and thirst.

But here Sidney came in hastily, and at once the train of pious thought was broken and scattered. The spirit he brought was alien to it.

He shook hands with Reuben in a quick and cursory manner; then turning to his wife,

"I am sorry to carry you away so soon, Amy; but I find we can catch a train that reaches East Bramley to-night; that is, if you don't delay."

She still clung to Reuben. The parting was more painful than she had expected.

Sidney grew impatient.

"Come, Amy, the train won't wait for us! You must say good-bye. What is that parcel you are carrying?"

"It is Reuben's present;" and she dried her eyes. "Look, Sidney!"

He came and looked. A smile, half of derision, passed over his face. He was about to shrug his shoulders, but the presence of Reuben was a check.

Amy was grave and silent for a little time, but the old influence was fast coming back. It only needed a few of Sidney's blandishments to make her just the same as ever; to make her forget every thing in the world but him.

## CHAPTER LV.

### RUTH HAS TO BE GOT RID OF.

"It seems to me, Ruth, that you do not exert yourself as you ought," said Miss Peckit, one day to her teacher. "You mope about, and have no spirit in you," continued that worthy lady, as she looked at Ruth's red eyes and pale cheeks. "Pray what have you been crying about now?"

Ruth turned away her face. She had long since found out that Miss Peckit was not the person to go to for sympathy. And yet she thought she had never needed sympathy so much before. She was very wretched indeed—as wretched, she said to herself, as any body could be on this earth. She had been six months at Miss Peckit's—a fact she could scarcely believe, even with the evidence of her senses.

The place had been more wretched, if possible, than she had anticipated; the fare more meagre, the daily life more devoid of comfort.

Comfort was a word that was not included in the Peckit vocabulary. At first Ruth's pride had held her up. Her obstinacy was of an enduring nature, and could not easily be tired. Both pride and obstinacy were getting wearied out by now.

It was very long since she had received any communication from the outer world. Her husband had addressed several letters of earnest expostulation to her, but she had replied to none of them. At length he held his peace; from Mrs. Mudford she never heard at all.

She seemed to lie, in this lonely place, forgotten by every body.

She could not stay here much longer; her health was failing, under the privations she endured. From reports which came now and then to her ear, this was no unusual thing with Miss Peckit's teachers. She had not forgotten the ill-omened assertion that "none of 'em stop."

Well, she would not stop, if she could only obtain what payment was due to her.

"There is nothing due to you at all," said Miss Peckit, angrily, when Ruth propounded the subject. "You came to me for a home, and a home you have had. Not a word was said about payment. It is not every one, let

"I think I shall be ill. I don't know what will become of me!" exclaimed Ruth, with a vague sense of alarm, and bursting into tears.

"You had better go back to your friend Mrs. Mudford," sneered Miss Peckit, eying her sharply.

After all, it was silly to try and keep her



SHE TOOK THE SACRED VOLUME REVERENTLY.

me tell you, that would receive a runaway wife!"

Ruth's pale cheek crimsoned, then again it looked so pale and wan that Miss Peckit added, in the same unfeeling tone, "If you are going to fall ill on my hands, it is another matter."

against her will. She was of very little use, and set a bad example to the girls. She was always fretting—the worst thing in the world for the spirits of the establishment; and she would certainly fall ill, sooner or later. Miss Peckit was running a risk by not letting her go,

peaceably and at once. Besides, rumors had got about concerning Ruth's position as a wife separated from her husband, and the parents of some of the pupils had made unpleasant remarks on the subject. It would never do to damage her own interests by harboring Ruth. She had expressed a wish to go, and she should. She would offer her a trifling sum of money, and get rid of her.

When this decision came to the ears of Ruth, her heart leaped for joy. It would be something to get free from this prison. And in one respect Miss Peckit was right; she would go straight to her friend Mrs. Mudford. Mrs. Mudford would be sure to receive her with open arms. She was not yet humbled enough to seek her husband—that might come after. He would be sure to hear of her return, and would perhaps seek her.

She longed to see her friend again. She had heard no syllable of kindness this long time—nothing but jars, and broils, and petty squabbles had met her ears. Mrs. Mudford was sure to be kind, when Ruth told her all. She would embrace her, and take her to her motherly heart. Had she not said many times, "I am quite a mother to you, Ruth?" And this was just the time to prove the truth of the statement.

She was glad to turn her back on the Fen country. The journey did not seem half so wearisome, now she had her face homeward. Her heart grew lighter and more cheerful every moment that she was being whirled away from Brook.

The four hours at last came to an end. Yonder was East Bramley, the home of her friend. Her troubles would surely come to an end now.

She had her luggage put into a cab, and was soon rattling away to the market-place. She told the driver to stop at Mr. Mudford's house. What that worthy individual would say to her, or what he would think or do, never came into her mind. His wife was the ruling power.

The girl who opened the door had never seen Ruth before. She was newly come; for Mrs. Mudford's servants and Miss Peckit's teachers might have been enrolled in the same category. Be that as it may, she admitted Ruth and her boxes with the utmost readiness. Her boxes were placed in the hall, and Ruth ran up stairs into the drawing-room, to wait till Mrs. Mudford should have finished dressing for dinner.

Ruth was spent and wearied. The thought of dinner was the most acceptable that could be presented to her.

Should she go to her friend at once? She was very impatient to see her, but it might not be safe: she might stumble upon Mr. Mudford. No; it was best to wait. And hark! there is the well-known step—there is Mrs. Mudford.

Ruth got up and went to the door to meet her. She would have thrown her arms round her, for she was thinking of the warm embrace and the cordial reception so long anticipated. But no such thing. Mrs. Mudford uttered a lit-

tle shriek of surprise, and drew back with unmistakable reluctance.

"Ruth! how in the world came you here?"

Ruth told her, hastily and volubly; but she had not half time to get through her story. An idea had seized on Mrs. Mudford's mind, and distracted it.

Those boxes she had wondered to see in the hall: depend upon it, they were Ruth's. Ruth had come back upon her hands, just when she supposed she had been got rid of. Nothing could be more inopportune. What on earth could she do with her? Certainly, she would, not harbor her a second time. She had found it did not answer. She had been blamed, and her name bandied about in the town. Besides, her husband would never allow it for a single moment. On this point he was firm as a rock.

It was very troublesome, and just at dinner-time, too, when she expected him in every moment. Well, she must get rid of her somehow or other.

"Pray are those boxes yours?" asked she, with anxiety.

"Yes. I thought—I supposed—"

"You had no right to think any thing," interrupted the bosom friend, angrily. "You must have known you could not come here: I told you so before. I took all that trouble—"

"But where am I to go?" exclaimed Ruth, in tears and distress.

"There's the inn! Good gracious! How could you be so imprudent, when *he* will be home, I expect, every minute? I shall order a cab. I would not have him see those boxes for any thing."

"Oh! Mrs. Mudford," sobbed Ruth, hysterically, "I did not think you could be so cruel. If you turn against me, what will become of me?"

"There—there! pray don't make a scene; it won't do a bit of good. When I found you a home with Miss Peckit, I washed my hands of you forever. Dear me! I hope the cab won't be long." And Mrs. Mudford stationed herself at the window to look.

Ruth wept aloud. Her disappointment and dismay were not to be described.

All at once Mrs. Mudford turned round with alacrity. "There it is. What a fortunate circumstance! Come, Ruth." And she fairly hustled her to the door.

The girl was putting the luggage into the cabman's charge. She was glad enough to be out of the scrape.

"Where shall I drive you to?" asked the man, touching his hat.

"I don't know—I can't tell," replied Ruth, stupefied, and glancing helplessly round.

Mrs. Mudford had gone back into the house, and shut the door after her.

## CHAPTER LVI.

"IT SERVES ME RIGHT."

BUT it would never do to stand in this way, the gazing-stock of the street. Ruth dried her eyes quickly and made up her mind what to do; she must follow Mrs. Mudford's advice and go to the inn—not the "George and Dragon," the head inn in East Bramley; that would be on too grand a scale, and quite beyond her means. There was a small second-rate house of entertainment in the lower end of the town. It was called the "Eagle," and to it Ruth resolved to go.

It became clearer to her every moment that she must make a compromise with her husband.

When she had partaken of some refreshment, of which she stood greatly in need, and disposed of her luggage, she would walk out in the direction of Jane Wilson's lodgings. It would be a stroll of simple reconnoitring. What would be the result she knew not. Perhaps she might see him. Perhaps, from his peaceful and secure abode, he might look out and behold her, homeless, friendless, almost in want.

Tears came to Ruth's eyes; she was beginning to see her error, to appreciate the blessings she had lost.

The "Eagle" was very full and very noisy. It was market-day in East Bramley. She had a great deal of discomfort to go through, and a great deal of trouble to get waited upon. It was quite impossible she could sojourn here long. When she had eaten her ill-served and carelessly-prepared meal, her heart began to beat very fast indeed.

She put a thick veil over her hat so as to hide her features completely; then she went out, and turned her steps in the direction of Jane Wilson's lodging.

Jane Wilson's lodging was in a pleasant part of the town. From the back you could see the fields. She remembered her husband telling her this, and saying that the walk to his office would do him a world of good. There was a garden in front, where roses and geraniums were in full beauty. It was a very agreeable abode, when she came to inquire into it.

Shall she see her husband at the window? He will have left his office by now. She glances fearfully up to it; there is no Horace—not a vestige of any familiar face! The window is closed, and the blind down, as if the room were unoccupied.

Stay—and her heart sank within her like a stone. What does that card mean? Why does it say, in black and white, "Lodgings to let?"

What! Horace's lodgings; the rooms that were to have been her home; she felt giddy and faint, and took hold of the railings that fenced in the garden. Horace, then, was gone! She had not been conscious till now how much she had been relying upon him for protection.

Where was he gone? Oh! what a wilderness the town seemed to her! What a keen, cruel disappointment she had met with!

As she still clung to the railings, a respectably-dressed woman came up to the gate. She looked at Ruth, as she opened it, with a glance of inquiry. This must be the owner of the house—Jane Wilson.

What a pleasant face she had! how tidy and comfortable she appeared! there would have been nothing whatever to object to in such a person as this. Why, then, had she been bent upon supposing exactly the opposite?

After another glance of inquiry, Jane Wilson spoke to her. "Were you looking for lodgings, ma'am? Mine are at liberty; will you please to walk in?"

There was one comfort—Jane Wilson had not the remotest idea who she was. Suppose she did walk in. Her limbs trembled so that she would be glad to sit down, and she might hear tidings of her husband. Not that she meant to ask, in so many words, she was too much ashamed.

What a pleasant room it was! How orderly—how completely comfortable! How every thing shone and sparkled with cleanliness! How happy she might have been in such a home as this!

She sat down without removing her veil. Tears had come into her eyes; she thought of what she had lost, and a sickening anxiety was at her heart. Where was Horace?

Jane Wilson, being by nature communicative, soon opened up the subject.

"These are the rooms, ma'am, one below and one above, and a little lumber-closet besides. They're fitted up nicely, you see. I had a new paper put up, for the last lodger—poor young gentleman!" and she sighed.

"Why poor?" stammered Ruth, her cheeks tingling behind her veil—"why do you call him so?"

"Oh, poor fellow! It was my young master, ma'am. I had known him from his cradle, and as nice a young gentleman, and as good-hearted as ever lived. What a pity it was, to be sure!"

"He has left, then?" said Ruth, carefully guarding the tone of her voice lest it should betray her.

"Indeed, he has, ma'am! The fact is, he has been drove away from East Bramley altogether."

It was hard work not to utter an exclamation of surprise and terror, but she did not. A chilling, icy sensation began to creep over her. She was afraid she was going to be ill.

"You see, ma'am, he was driven away by his wife."

Ruth sat as if she had been turned to stone. "More's the pity he married such a silly thing," resumed Jane Wilson, fairly launched on the subject. "He never said a word to me, nor to any body; he wasn't the kind of man. If ever there was a born and bred gentleman, it was my master, Mr. Vincent."

There—the very name. She trembled from head to foot. She was in an agony to know what had become of him, and where he was

gone to. But she dared not trust herself to ask, and it turned out that Jane Wilson did not know.

"Mrs. Vincent would not come to these lodgings; they wasn't good enough for her; yet she was only a girl who used to go out teaching," said Jane Wilson, contemptuously.

"It serves me right," thought Ruth, in the bitterness of her regret—"quite right!"

"And would you believe it, ma'am, she lost him his best friends, and stirred up such a talk and mischief in the town, that his business—he was a lawyer—fell off, and he was half-ruined! That was the reason why he went away."

"Perhaps he will try to practise somewhere else," Ruth forced herself to say, in the vain hope of eliciting further information.

"I don't know; those sort of things are what pell a man down. I am afraid, myself, that he has left the country; he said something about it."

Ruth got up; she was shocked beyond measure. The last speech came upon her with a stunning blow. Her sign of departure recalled Jane Wilson to the point in hand.

"Will you look at the room up stairs, ma'am? I did so try to make everywhere comfortable for Mrs. Vincent. These plants in the window I had put in for her; and I had a bit of new carpet—"

"No, thank you," said Ruth, hastily, as a feeling of deadly sickness came over her; "it is getting late. I must go."

She could not say home, for she had none.

"Perhaps you will give a call to-morrow?" said Jane Wilson, unwilling to lose the chance of a lodger.

"I will see—I will see!" said Ruth, hurriedly. And she got out into the air as soon as she could.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### RIGHT AND WRONG.

"Miss SIBLEY is sitting up for you, sir," said the servant, as he admitted his master.

"What, Maude?" and he looked at his watch; "why, it is eleven o'clock!"

"I know, sir; but Miss Sibley said we were to let her know as soon as you came. She is in the drawing-room, sir."

Mr. Sibley had his watch in his hand. "That's curious," muttered he to himself; "some invalid's whim, I suppose."

Very leisurely he went up stairs. His head was full of other business; he had no room in it for Maude. He never thought of her at all.

To-morrow was the day fixed for Luke Ormond to pay the debt, or else to have the Meadow Farm seized in default. It would be a glorious day for Sibley.

"Whichever way it turns out, they are ruined, and I am safe," thought he, exultingly.

Yet he had been in a state of anxiety greater than the occasion seemed to demand. His

servants noticed that his lamp had burned in his room until the morning; that he left his food untasted; that he had been in and out of the house incessantly. As he went up the staircase, you could see that his face, for all the wicked triumph upon it, was worn and changed.

"Well, Maude," and he looked in hastily, and not intending to stay a moment, "how is it you are not in bed? It is more than time."

She was standing in the middle of the room, as though she had been walking up and down, in the same spirit of restlessness that haunted her father. Even in his preoccupation he could not help but notice how pale she was.

"Come, Maude, you are doing a silly thing. What will the doctor say?"

He had walked up to her, but she went to close the door after him. He could see by her manner that she had something important to say.

In that critical posture of his affairs, the slightest thing made him uneasy. But, pshaw! how foolish and cowardly he was. He had been overworked, and was getting nervous. A night's rest would set him up.

"Now, Maude, out with it. If you do not want to go to bed, I do."

She had closed the door, and fastened it, as though she were resolved to keep out intruders. The tone of her voice was low and stifled, as if afraid a whisper might escape to other ears than theirs.

"I wish to speak to you about this debt."

"What debt?"

He asked the question hastily, and in a tone of alarm. Surely she could not mean *that* debt. He had kept it from her sedulously. He had earnestly requested that no tidings of it might reach her sick-chamber. How, then, had she heard it?

"What debt, Maude? Can't you speak, girl?"

She did speak, in the same stifled voice, but which had yet a depth of anxiety in it as though the matter pressed heavily on her mind and heart.

"The debt of which you accuse the Ormonds."

Again that name. His face grew dark and dangerous in its expression, but her pure serene eye met his, and subdued it.

"Do you remember," she said, "one day, when you destroyed a book in this very room—when you threw it into the fire and burnt it?"

"Ah! and should burn it again, if it belonged to an Ormond!"

He spoke with a fierceness and malignity that made her start. But she recovered her air of calm authority in a moment. Hers was the superior strength of good as opposed to evil.

"Since that day," she resumed, "I have been, as you know, suffering from a long illness; but yesterday I left my room for the first time—"

"You need not tell me that," he said, harshly and without feeling. "You are always ill, always keeping your room."



Her lip trembled; it was hard, even after long usage, to endure his taunts and bitter speeches with composure.

"A paper dropped from that book," she said. "I was not aware of it at the time. It was lying on the floor when you came into the room. Neither of us noticed it."

His face changed perceptibly. It was impossible to misinterpret the look of alarm that spread itself over his features.

Still, he concealed his feelings by a laugh.

"Is this all you want to tell me? It is scarcely worth your while to bolt us in for that;" and he looked at his watch with an impatient gesture.

"It is not all; that paper was of vital importance. Much mischief, much misery might have been spared had it been produced earlier. Can you not guess what it was?"

"Not I, indeed;" and he added words it would be a shame to repeat.

"Then I will tell you;" and in the look she gave him he read her full and distinct knowledge of the whole transaction, with all its fraud and malignity. "I will tell you. It was the acknowledgment of the debt as paid; the legal receipt, duly attested, which sets the matter at rest forever."

"I—I—do not believe you. It is a—"

But again her eyes stopped him; again her pure and lofty expression gave her the mastery.

He drew his hand across his forehead. He felt stunned, and as if he were about to fall.

What! were his schemes to be upset at the eleventh hour? Was the thing he most dreaded to rise up before him in all its terrors now?—now, on the eve of his triumph, when he had thought himself secure?

Well, be it so, and a guilty sense of relief came into his mind. The holder of the secret was his own child. No other person knew, except, indeed, his accomplice and his tool, and he was sure of him. He must have two accomplices instead of one, that was all. Maude could not, in common decency, impeach her own father. If needs be, she must be made acquainted with the hidden depths of the affair. Things she knew not of must be put in plain English before her, unless indeed—and he would try this plan first—unless she would give up the receipt to him. Ah! if she would do that, and his eye glanced at the gas-light overhead.

A few seconds—a minute heap of ashes, and all would be over.

But she would not give it up. It was not here, she said. He need not advance with that angry gesture, as though he would take it from her by force. It was safe out of his reach. Nothing should induce her to give it up.

What was he to do now? Calm down his ruffled passions, and tell her—all.

"Maude," said he, restraining himself with what power he had, "when you know the whole bearings of the case, you will at once place in my hands a document which is fraught with ruin to us; to us, my child, to us. The Ormonds may

indeed escape, but I, your father—have you no mercy on me?"

Yes, she said, she had mercy; she would show it in withholding him from a deed of injustice and dishonor.

"But if I have placed myself in a position such as you have not even guessed at; if I have had difficulties and temptations unknown to a girl like you; if I was resolved to master them, to climb up the ladder at any risk—at any cost, what then, Maude?"

"I do not understand you," she said faintly, and a deadly pallor spreading over her face. "What temptations? What do you mean?"

"I mean that the payment of this debt to Sir Frederick will hide a defalcation occasioned by me; that I have—"

"Oh, no—no!" she cried, hiding her face in her hands; "do not tell me that. Father—dear father, have some pity, some mercy!"

"It is you who must have mercy, Maude, on me," and he came near to her, and spoke with intense earnestness, as if his life hung on her decision. "You must view my conduct in the light of a daughter's affection"—the word was strange to him, and he stumbled over it—"you must remember the comforts and luxuries insured to you by my—my success. You must not judge me harshly; you must allow time for me to right myself, and save the misery of an exposure. All this you must do, Maude, and will."

She was crouching down, her face hidden, her whole appearance that of one on whom had fallen an intolerable burden. She did not answer or look up, or give him the least hint of what she meant to do.

"You must be my friend, Maude, and counsellor. If I have been cold and untender, I will never be so again. I will love and cherish you with the deepest gratitude. And it is not much I ask, only that"—and he came close to her, and spoke the words into her ear—"only that we may burn that paper!"

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### MAUDE'S LAST TRIAL.

THE great clock on the stairs struck twelve. Every stroke sounded distinctly through the house. When it had finished, a tap was heard at the door.

Maude roused herself at the sound. She rose in her usual quiet manner. She was evidently putting a strong restraint upon herself. She walked to the door and opened it.

The person who had knocked was Maude's old and faithful attendant. She had been for some time in great anxiety about her mistress.

"Had you not better go to bed, Miss Sibley? You can not know how late it is."

Maude spoke in her usual tone when she replied. She held her face averted, so that the old servant should not see it.



"You need not wait up for me, Jane; I am talking to my father. Good-night."

The woman did not seem satisfied. Sibley could hear her remonstrating, but eventually she departed, and Maude closed the door and again fastened it. Before she did so, she stood listening to the retreating footsteps until they died away, and all was silent.

This little interruption had reassured her father. Evidently her wish had been to screen him. He came forward with hope in his face. "Then you mean to stand by me, and to save me?"

She sat down, for a violent trembling had seized upon her. Otherwise she was calmer by far than he was.

"Maude," he said eagerly, "where is it—that—that paper? Can you not fetch it? You see how clear a path there is for our escape; how easy it will be to avoid this frightful ruin. Where is it?"

She did not reply. He went on eagerly, though his heart misgave him, "We can destroy it in a moment. No time can be more fitting, no place more secret. No one will see us, Maude, no one."

She spoke then. "Yes," she said, looking steadily at him—"yes; there is One who will see us—who sees us now, and is cognizant of our innermost thoughts."

Her solemnity of manner silenced him for the moment. He knew how irreligious his life had been; that even now he was without God and without hope in the world.

She took advantage of his silence. She hastened to put before him the evil and the good, the blessing and the cursing; to point out to him which path he ought to choose. "Father," she said with earnestness and affection, "let me beseech you to put away the wicked thought; to let the sin come out in all its enormity. Better be judged now than *then*; better be punished now than forever!"

This is what he had feared all along—Maude's principles. They had stood up like a rampart against which he had never ceased to be in collision. Light and darkness, sin and holiness, could make no compact. He knew it in his heart. If he had not, he must have learnt the lesson now. Still, there was a vulnerable point in this well-proven armor—her feelings as a daughter. He would work on these. Violence and clamor, his better judgment told him, were useless.

He reminded her she could at least be silent. If she refused to destroy the paper, she need not produce it. When was such a thing heard of, as for a daughter to betray her father?

Ah! the point was vulnerable, and the weapon keen. Her poor weak frame quivered with the torture of it. Nature suggested many reasons why she should acquiesce. Her conduct would be in unison with the first and strongest principle of our being—filial affection. No one would blame her. Besides, no one would suspect the existence of the fraud. Things

would go on as they had done. There would be no exposure, no ruin. It was an easy path by which, as he had told her, they might escape.

Her influence with him would be stronger than it had ever been before. It would be very sweet to have this coldness done away, and gratitude and love instead—to be cherished instead of neglected; to have a father in the place of an indifferent and unwilling protector. And all this at the price of one small act of compliance.

It would be done in a moment, this little deed, and leave them free and in security. But there was a keen sense of right in Maude's mind which rent away these flimsy sophisms. To connive at a sin was, in the eye of Heaven, to be guilty of it.

She told him so. Painful as it was to her, she refused, plainly and distinctly. She dare not abet him in his design, and she would not.

But he had made some kind of impression. He saw it in the tears of anguish that gushed from her eyes, and the trembling of her poor weak frame. He followed it up skillfully. He used all the arguments he could invent. He tried tenderness, and persuasion, and command. He assailed each point in succession. He would force her, if needs be, into compliance.

But she did not yield. Let the suffering be what it might, she would keep her high position. The voice of duty was plain, the guidings of religion unmistakable. No fraud, or chicanery, or double-dealing could find admittance there. To yield was to give up all she held most sacred—to imperil her soul and his.

She would not forsake him; she told him so, as she wept in the full anguish of her heart. In his adversity, and when all else forsook him, she would abide firm and unchangeable. She would go with him where he listed. She would devote herself to the task of soothing and cheering him through the dark days that were coming. She would work with her own hands if needed. She would suffer hardships gladly and without a murmur, only let restitution be made, and this foul blot be done away, at any cost, at any sacrifice.

In his heart he was furious with her. This was not what he wanted. What did he care for restitution? He wanted to keep his place among his fellows, and to root out the Ormonds.

It was evident that she would not help him. The wicked spirit within was ready to break all bounds. It suggested thoughts that were horrible. Her puny life alone stood between him and safety. He was almost tempted to wish it gone.

It was awful to press her further then. She was faint and exhausted. Though the resolve stood firm, the physical powers seemed as though they would fail utterly. To look at her, you might think this trial would be her last.

It would be better to leave her for a time. Neither of them could go to rest that night. Perhaps a touch of relenting would come as she

sat alone. His room was close at hand, he could hear the slightest sound, and he was exhausted too, and unable to protract this wretched scene. He might get fresh strength, and think of fresh arguments, and win fresh persuasions. If driven to absolute despair, he scarce knew what he might not do.

He remained away longer than he intended. He had thrown himself on the couch in his room and fallen into an uneasy slumber. When he awoke, daylight was beginning to glimmer in the east. He rose up hastily. All his cares and dangers came flashing into his mind. He would go back to Maude.

He was very desperate. He would use threatening now, and try her courage. The courage of a woman did not stand for much, he thought.

The room was as he left it. The gas was burning, and she was lying on the sofa yonder.

Is she asleep? If so, he must wake her. The house will be astir presently, and he must know what she means to do. How defenseless she is, and how completely in his power; and how utter the ruin will be! Home, and friends, and fortune, all will be gone. And one slight act might remedy the mischief. He gnashes his teeth as he thinks of it. One little concession, one lifting of her finger, and she will not do it. No, not to save them both.

He has never loved her. As a child, he did not care for the puny thing. She has always disappointed him. He hates her religion. He knows he can not bend her to his purpose; he knows that to the very death she will resist all compromise with evil.

How fast she sleeps! She must have been very weary; and a touch of human feeling struggles into his mind. Still, he dare not allow this respite to continue. He must begin again that attempt in which he has been so often baffled—in which he must succeed, and will.

Stay, is it sleep? How rigid is the outline of her form—how awfully motionless! Surely not a breath stirs. He has heard of some dread presence that has been called sleep's twin brother. It is more like *that*, and his face turns ashy white—more like *death*.

A mixed sensation is in his mind—horror first, and an undefinable reluctance to approach her. Then a vague remorse, a consciousness that he had tried her beyond her strength; that he had forced her through a furnace of trial in which the poor weak frame has been consumed; that, through the darkness of the night, in every moment of solitude, often, too, amid the busy throng of men, he shall have her mild, patient eyes haunting him; that a good angel will have left his side, and the prayers and intercessions offered so long for him will have ceased.

Let him approach, pallid, trembling, guilty as he is, and the fact will admit of no doubt or denial. While he slept that troubled slumber, Maude had lain down and died. This trial has indeed been her last.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

THE little gossiping world of East Bramley found at this time an abundance of material to serve as matter for conversation. Indeed, it had never been more amply provided for. Ruth's escapade, Horace Vincent's departure, the breaking off of Miss Easton's engagement, and Sidney Peters's marriage, all were discussed, with the addition of as many exaggerations as could be supplied. Rumor, with her hundred tongues, had never been so busy.

There was something heroic about Adela. A feeblér mind might have been disquieted by all this busy gossip, but she cared little for it. When her father proposed to take her away, she declined. She clung to her home; wherever she went, she must carry with her the sting and the pain. Hers had been a bitter experience, a shipwreck of her fairest hopes. No time, she thought, could heal her wounds or mitigate their anguish; but she would not give way to selfish grief; she had others to live for, if her own history had been rendered a blank. She would take up her daily duties, and bear patiently and submissively the bitter cross laid upon her.

She had not allowed herself more than a brief interval of solitude, in which to commune with her own heart and seek consolation from above. She took her usual place the day after her conversation with her father.

It touched him with unusual tenderness to see her; this trouble had changed her sadly. Her eye had lost its gladness; her face was pale and worn; her movements, usually so brisk and energetic, were languid and inert. She could not, all at once, be the same Adela. Any one, to look at her, might guess what a deadly blight there had been; but she was calm and even cheerful. Conscience told her the step she had taken was a right one; she knew that the failure had been in the character of the man she had loved so well, and better suffer now than afterwards. Better any thing, than build her happiness on a foundation of sand. Her father seemed more drawn to her than he had ever been before. The two ceased to lead their lives so much apart. This sorrow had, in some degree, united them.

He had never uttered a word of reproach, or used the authority he had intended. Yet until the report of Sidney's marriage reached them, he had not given up all idea of reconciliation. He had not urged it. Adela did not know the reason of his forbearance. It was hidden in his own heart. It was because of Margaret's child. He longed to see her again, though he never said so. Adela was in ignorance that he had seen her at all. The blue eyes, and golden hair, and sweet infantile face dwelt in his memory. His heart was softened to an extent beyond belief, but he told no one. He was a proud man, and still stubborn. He would not openly yield the point he had clung to for years.

He was ashamed of saying so, but he would like the decree of banishment to be remitted. He wanted to have the little one with him daily, to feel the touch of that baby hand, and see again in its features the likeness of the loved and the lost. His home would be brighter and happier, he thought, if it were so.

Now and then he entertained a vague hope that Adela would herself grow impatient of the barrier and break it down. When she entered the room, he would give a hurried and anxious glance as if he expected to see the little one behind her, but he forgot that Adela was strictly a woman of her word. She considered herself "in duty bound."

One day, as she rose up to leave the room, he said coldly and indifferently, and hiding all that was beneath, "Adela, are you going away?"

"Yes," she said, and no more. She was bound not to intrude the subject upon him, and she was going, as he had guessed, to her sister's child. His eye seemed to hold her back. She waited, her hand on the lock, until he should speak again.

"Shall you be long, Adela?"

He spoke uneasily, his manner was excited, and he was pale and red by turns. Something unusual was the matter. She came back.

"I will not go," she said soothingly.

"Oh, yes—yes, you may go."

She moved again to the door. His manner surprised her. She was as far from suspecting the cause, as the east is from the west.

"Adela!"

She turned again.

"My dear, I think—I wish—" He had a strange hesitation in his manner, and seemed to speak with difficulty. "I know where you are going. You need not suppose I am in ignorance that—"

He paused. She was more surprised than ever, and a little alarmed. She thought mischief might be about to happen, and her zeal and fidelity rallied round the little one she was pledged to protect.

What was her amazement when he said, "You need not banish her any longer. I—I wish to see her."

What! to see Margaret's child, when—and all the past rushed confusedly into her mind. When he had been so stern, so inflexible, so cruel! when the banishment had been so absolute, as she had feared, so hopeless—could it be that she was on the brink of so great a happiness? That balmy drops of comfort could fall once more on her desolate heart? Even now a faint pulse of sweetest joy stirred within her. Even now she began to think her prayers were about to be answered.

He saw her agitation, and he smiled more pleasantly than he had done for years. It was a benignant, a fatherly smile.

"You can bring her here," he said, "here, Adela—to me."

Then it was a reality. It was no delusion.

Thank Heaven for it! It was a blessed errand to go upon—a blessed thing to do.

Union, reconciliation! After these her heart had long yearned. The path of duty, which had seemed so bleak and rugged, how full it might be now of sweetest content! What treasures lie scattered to repay the toil-worn traveller as he climbs to yonder heights on which shines the sun!

She went quickly, joyfully; her step seemed to recover its elasticity, her eye its gladness. For are not the purest drops of joy those in which self has the least part or lot?

The little one came readily enough. Her small, pattering footstep sounded along the passages. She had never been into this part of the house before. It was like bringing her from banishment. Oh, that *she* were here as well—that wandering, lost, homeless mother! Well, it might even be so, one day.

## CHAPTER LX.

### "IS SHE NEVER TO BE FORGIVEN?"

"AND so, Ethel, when Jack came in sight of the two big giants—"

"Hush, papa," said Adela, laughing; "some one is at the door."

It was the servant with a card.

"I do not know the gentleman," said Adela, as she scanned the name on the card. "Papa, the Rev. Reuben Howard."

"Come to beg, I dare say for some charity or other. You had better go, my dear. I want to finish my story," and he turned to the little eager face at his knee. "And so, Ethel, when Jack—"

Adela did not hear the conclusion of the recital, entertaining as no doubt it was. She was walking slowly away, the card in her hand. It did not matter much who the stranger was, she thought, or on what errand he had come. Her mind was wholly absorbed in one great joy. She never ceased to lift her heart in thankfulness to Heaven. Even the sting of her own sorrow was in some degree mitigated.

Her father and Ethel had become the dearest friends. She had not dared to be too sanguine, but the event had more than answered her expectations. He would not willingly allow the child out of his sight a moment. It made the tears of delight gush to Adela's eyes many times to see them. She had left them together, without fear or doubting. That wretched banishment would never come again. Ah, it was worth all she had suffered to feel that this little helpless one was saved!

Thinking thus, and quite unprepared for what awaited her, Adela entered the room.

The stranger rose as she did so, and bowed distantly.

This, then, was the Rev. Reuben Howard. How grave, and stern, and unbending he looks. From the very first she felt sure that he did not

come on such an errand as her father had supposed.

There was something impressive about him, Adela thought. His pale worn face must have seen some sorrow. His manner was reserved—almost ascetic. She stood in awe of him already.

She asked him to be seated, and she looked inquiringly at him. He was an entire stranger to her. She wondered what his errand could be.

He had been glancing round on the varied elegancies and luxuries with which he found himself surrounded. This home, he thought, or such an one as this, was where Margaret Seymour had once lived. What a contrast to her present forlorn condition! He could not bear to think of it. Nothing could justify it. She was their own flesh and blood. Nothing could excuse their letting her perish of absolute want.

These reflections made his face grave and stern, and his manner unusually severe. Adela felt it from the beginning. Yet he thought, as he looked at her, he had never seen any face so beautiful as hers.

Such a face ought to be full of mercy and benignity, he thought.

And then he told her his errand was one of mercy. He did not say more in the first speech he made to her.

By-and-by the whole story would come out; but it would require some tact in relating, and he must not be too abrupt.

It astonished him that such a lovely woman should be Margaret's sister. The sister he had pictured to himself was older, and harsher, and without any sensibility. Otherwise he felt sure such an occurrence could never have happened.

She replied hastily. For some inscrutable reason, she felt a dread of this man, and a desire to propitiate him.

"I am quite willing to listen to any such appeal," she said. "I know the distress around is very great. Many cases may have been passed over that we should be glad to relieve."

"This case has been passed over," he replied, abruptly, "and for years."

She colored with surprise. It did not occur to her, for a moment, what he meant. She felt uneasy, and as though his keen reproving eye exercised some charm over her.

"I do not know to what you allude," she replied, in a hesitating manner.

His tone softened, but he was still scanning her face with the same severe scrutiny. He did not intend to spare her.

"Can you think of no one," he asked, "near and dear to you; but who has been as one lost to you and yours for years? Can you?"

"Oh, yes!" and her face changed with strong emotion, and she clasped her hands; "Oh, yes," and tears gushed to her eyes. "There is; you can not mean—you can not have heard—of my sister!"

She had risen, and come near to him. Her garments touched him. The beautiful face,

full of anxiety and supplication, was bent over him.

"Oh," exclaimed she, as he did not answer, "if you knew how I have prayed, and sought, and yearned after her; how dear she is to me; how earnestly I long once more to see her, you would not keep back any intelligence you may have gained—you would tell me all, at once."

He was much moved; he had not thought of this; he had never expected to see such emotion; he had thought of a nature cold, callous, and obdurate. Here was a sister's heart, a sister's love!

His voice softened now; he was full of sympathy and of admiration. He had heard none but the barest outlines of the story. Margaret herself had been his informant. The lucid interval had come. She could not die, she said, without embracing her child. He thought himself it was the pang of separation that was killing her.

He would not trust to writing in a case like this. He had undertaken the journey because there was no other person found to do it—because it was one of the many acts of Christian benevolence with which Reuben's memory would some day be crowned.

He told her the facts just as they had occurred. It was a terrible picture he drew of distress, and desolation, and despair. But not one touch was exaggerated. The thing had taken place exactly as he related it.

Adela listened with a fearful interest. Her eye was fixed intently upon him. Now and then she shuddered. Once she gave a little cry of anguish. When he finished, she rose hastily. He had come, he said, to induce her to visit her sister.

"Oh, yes!" she said, hurriedly and eagerly, and she moved towards the door. In imagination she was there already. In imagination the poor, aching head was gathered to her pitying bosom. She was there to tend, to soothe—if possible, to restore.

But her father?

She stopped with a feeling of uncertainty and alarm. Would he permit it? Never yet had she dared to mention the name of Margaret. She would not be guilty of an undutiful act. She would ask his consent. She might, perhaps, have invented an excuse, or even taken her departure unknown to him. But this would not have been in accordance with Adela's principles of rectitude. It would be doing evil that good might come.

With a beating heart she hastened to the room where she had left her father. He was there still. She could hear his voice, and the little one's childish laugh. There they were. Ethel on her grandpapa's knee, her face upturned, her eyes full of eager interest in the story he was telling. They were so absorbed in the story and in each other that Adela's entrance was unperceived. She stood a moment, looking very pale, and yet a smile shining amid her tears. This was something indeed to live for.

This blissful reunion—this sweet reconciliation—might it last for evermore!

Would it last if that other topic were trenchanted upon—if the veil were lifted from that skeleton? No matter, it has come to her now, in the direct path of duty. She is in duty bound! By this time her father had perceived her. It was a slight and cursory glance he gave, not sufficient to note any change in her.

"Is Mr. Howard gone?" he asked, carelessly.

"No, papa."

"What does he want?"

Still not looking at her—still stroking, with tenderness and love, the fair curls of the child on his knee.

"What does he want, Adela? Who is he? Where does he come from?"

"He comes," and she drew near to him, and spoke in a tone so tremulous, so full of deep and earnest feeling, that he looked full into her face—"he comes from *Margaret*!"

He did not start or utter any exclamation, as she thought he would. His countenance became perfectly rigid and impassive. He might have been turned to stone. She laid her hand timidly on his shoulder. Her heart beat faster than ever. Danger signals, she knew, were all abroad. Yet she must go on. *Duty* and affection urged her. At any risk—at any cost—she must go on.

In a few words she told him all. He did not look at her, so she ventured to scan his countenance in hopes of some encouragement; but none was expressed. The face was stern and, as it were, iron-bound!

When she had finished, still trembling, and apprehensive, and ignorant of what might follow, she was about to make her request, to ask that she might go to her sister.

But she was saved from the difficulty. The little one had been listening attentively. She had caught up some words relating to her mother—the mother she had never ceased to remember and to love.

She cried out vehemently, "Mamma—mamma! let me go to mamma!"

Did the face change? Not a bit. He lifted the child from his knee, and withdrew to the window. There he stood looking out. He did not say a word.

Adela took the child in her arms. She was still calling out for her mamma—just as she had done one time long since, when Adela carried her away—when the poor grief-stricken mother lay insensible, and, as it seemed, half-dead.

What should she do? There was something dreadful in her father's silence—in the obduracy of his nature, in the rigid attitude he had assumed. Reconciliation seemed never more distant than now. Has she not told him the whole sad story? Can any appeal be stronger? Margaret, his own flesh and blood, his own child, lies ill, friendless, and alone. Is she never to be forgiven? Will nothing wash out

the offense? Will not distress, want, sickness—death? Is she to die, without father, sister, or child?

No, no! It must not be!

Again she asked him. Her voice was stronger and firmer. Her heart rebelled against such cruelty.

"You will let us go, papa—Ethel and I?"

There was a short silence. Then the words dropped on her ear, spoken coldly, and without feeling or sympathy, "Yes; I will not prevent you. You had better go."

Cold as the utterance was, her heart leaped at the sound. To see once more the sister she had so grieved for and yearned after—to be allowed to succor and befriend her, was a blessed permission indeed. A tide of joy and hope seemed to come with it. For the moment Adela lost her self-possession. She caught eagerly at what she imagined was an opportunity.

She came nearer to her father, and said impulsively, and without her usual caution, "Papa—dear papa—surely you will forgive her. Surely you will see her—"

But she had miscalculated her power. The face now slowly turned to her had no forgiveness in it. Its hardness and obduracy shocked her. There was no need for him to reply—she trembled lest he should, and hurried from the room.

He might, perhaps, recall his permission. He might insist that Margaret should die alone!

## CHAPTER LXI.

### SHE HAD KNOWN WHAT SORROW MEANT.

WHEN Adela came back to the room where Reuben was waiting, she was ready dressed for the journey. He was standing at the window as though he were admiring the park-like view that stretched itself before him. In reality he saw nothing of it. His mind was fixed on the feeble, fading form he had left yonder—on Margaret? Nay, it was not so. His mind was fixed on Adela.

He thought her very beautiful. He liked the expression of her face—the resolution of the dark eye that had met his like some kindred spirit. His thoughts, quitting all other subjects, held fast to this one as by a kind of spell.

But, for shame! Why is he beguiled by a fair face and a bright eye? He, whose blood has been so cold and passionless. What is he dreaming of, even to remember them?

He is come here on no fancy errand—no idle whim. This matter is of life or death. Are his serious thoughts to be put aside by a tress of raven hair? Why does he dare to glance round this home of refinement and luxury? To note the pictures on the walls, the varied elegancies that appeal to a correct taste, and are so many signs of it? And to think of his bare room, and his companionless life, and his lonely hours, unsmiled on by any sympathetic face.

Has he come all this way to pick up seeds of vanity and discontent?

For shame, Reuben Howard! this must be a temptation of the evil one. He will think of her no more. Folly! why he has only seen her some few minutes!

"I am so much indebted to your kindness, I shall ever remember it, for my poor sister's sake." And she offered him her hand. He took it a moment, and then dropped it; his manner was cold and rigid as could be. But as he turned hastily away, a quick, warm flush



"LET ME GO TO MAMMA!"

Here she is again! Do what he will, he must meet her dark eye, and hear that voice so strangely musical. What! is she going? Will she be his companion home?

How very lovely is that face now, all tears and smiles!

"We will start at once," she says eagerly,

died his cheek and brow; Adela never saw it; it was gone when he spoke to her.

His voice was stern, almost to unfriendliness, when he asked her if the matter had been laid before her father.

She was rather wounded by his manner. Her spirits were fluttered and agitated, and she



would have liked a word to soothe her. She had almost looked for it, but it came not.

She answered his question. Yes, she said, her father had given his consent. And she was all anxiety to begin the journey. Every moment was of consequence. And her eyes were again raised to him with a look of entreaty.

A face full of sensibility and candor; a noble, a glorious face; he thought it could deceive no one.

Yet he turned from her abruptly. He was ready, he said. And he told her the time when the next train would start. There was an hour to spare.

"Still we will start," she said eagerly; "I would rather wait at the station than run the risk—"

She paused. She did not like to finish the sentence—

Lest her father should take back his permission.

During the ride not many words were exchanged. The child was on her knee, and she talked to it, and told it they were going to mamma. And once she shed a few tears, and then she sat silent, as if absorbed in thoughts which led her far away from here.

He had resolved to keep the mastery over himself, and suppress any idle fancy, as foolish as it was presumptuous. But he did not altogether succeed. He could not help but steal hurried glances at the face which charmed him more than any face had done before. He had been working in a sphere into which grace and beauty rarely came. He had never, amid his ceaseless labors, beloved as they were, had space to cultivate a single association suggestive of other and brighter scenes.

No flowers grew on the rugged wayside of his life.

What! Again discontent, repinings, and dangerous comparisons!

Beware, Reuben Howard, beware! Trample out the germ ere it has time to live.

During the hour of waiting, as Adela walked up and down the platform too restless for inaction, he glanced at her from the window of the room where he sat. He could not help but do so, though for every look there was a sting of self-reproach. Every time he looked he thought her more attractive than he did the last. When the train started, and they were at length on the way, he was drawn, almost against his will, into conversation. She asked him about her sister, and they spoke of many things. And once when he hinted that sorrow must of necessity be unknown to her, surrounded as she was by all the world could give, he found he was mistaken. He had touched a chord that was painfully sensitive. She turned away to hide her tears.

She knew, then, what trouble meant, this woman with her beauty and her wealth, and removed from him so widely.

By-and-by she grew tremulous and agitated. The journey's end was rapidly approaching. "Do you see, Ethel?" she said to the child,

"that great city yonder? That is where we are going to find mamma." The child uttered a cry of delight. Her cheek glowed, her eye was bright with expectation. She clung closer to her aunt. Adela could feel the beating of the little eager heart against her own.

And now the train had stopped, and Reuben assisted them to alight. "The distance," he said, "was very short indeed, only to the next street. Would Miss Easton walk?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. But after a few moments she laid her hand on his arm.

Her limbs trembled. She could scarcely proceed without assistance. She had been ill, she told him, and her strength was not the same as usual.

He little guessed what the illness had been.

But his manner changed. He ceased to be cold and rigid. He drew her hand under his arm, and assumed an air of protection and of sympathy. He would have gone with her to the world's end, he knew that—this stern, impassive Reuben Howard, to whom love had been so deep a mystery.

She felt the change, and she began to weep. Poor Adela! Her troubles had told upon her. The strong will and unbroken spirit were subdued. She could never again be precisely the same Adela.

He soothed her as they went along. He had got into the right key now; though all he said had the semblance of mere courtesy and compassion—the tenderness of the strong to the weak. No one could have guessed what lay beneath.

The walk was a very short one. Here was the house, he said. He would leave her. His presence would be only an intrusion. She scarce heeded him, or listened to what he said. Her excitement was very great. She could think of nothing but the interview with Margaret—that she should once again see Margaret. And how she had longed for this—how she had prayed for it!

She has entered the house. Her foot is on the stairs. She has found her way, as by instinct, to the door of the room. Then she pauses. It is not for her to enter first.

Come, little one, with eyes of blue and shining looks of gold. Enter the sick-chamber. Go to thy mother; her heart yearns for thee. It has well-nigh broken in the parting. Put round her thy baby arms. Cling closer, closer still. Creep to her very heart. Thy baby touch, thy soft kisses will heal her. She will live, if only for the blessedness of seeing thee once more, of holding thee in her arms—her child!

## CHAPTER LXII.

### NOT TOO DEARLY BOUGHT.

ADELA has gone. That sound of wheels was the carriage driving away. Her father still stands by the window; he has no wish to see



Reuben, and has declined to do so. Adela has gone in haste; she has not even said farewell. Let her go! it is perhaps fitting, and, after all, the best. Margaret will die. This may be the last scene—the very last. Her life's history has been a checkered and a sad one. This may be its ending!

His eye glances round the room on which baby playthings lie scattered.

Is it so very long since Margaret was a child? How long?

He rises, and walks slowly from the room along the passages. How silent and lonely the house seems! For the time he is childless; does he understand the full meaning of the word "childless?"

He goes to his room. There is an old bureau, with a secret drawer. He has not opened it for years and years. It is strange that the desire to do so should come upon him at this moment.

It is full of papers and of pictures. The pictures are likenesses. His fingers touch one at the very beginning.

Margaret!

She was a laughing child when that likeness was taken. He remembers how she sat on his knee. What is that spot on the little dimpled cheek? A tear—a newly-fallen tear! Can it be his?

Again, Margaret! Another likeness, and a record of her. The record speaks of his wife's decease, and how she left to him, as a sacred charge, the baby Adela and her sweet Margaret.

More records still. Yes, a letter. It has been placed here to be shut up amid these annals of the past. This, too, is from Margaret.

"I sit and listen," she says, "to his hoarse cough, and watch his face grow every day more sharp and thin. What can I do? I have no means of providing him the comforts he requires. I must see him *die*, unless you render some assistance. For myself—I would never ask; but for *him*—"

He need read no more. He remembers every word. And the man *did* die. And the letter met with no response.

And the sweet child he loves so fondly, and to whom his heart clings—this was her *father*!

He can only be led up by this channel; these baby hands can guide him where none else can. He is softened now; witness the tear.

He has often thought of Margaret lately, by day, by night; again and again has he remembered her.

Sometimes in her childhood, the sport and the pet of the household. In her early girlhood. As a woman, when she left him for Ernest Seymour. He remembers circumstances which extenuate the act. He remembers his own imprudence in allowing the young man such free access to the house. For a time, blind himself to the fact as he may, he encouraged him.

It was too late when he found out his mistake. Far too late when the girl's affections were engaged past recall.

"Will the young artist be successful? Has he talent?" he had asked of a competent authority. The authority had shaken his wise head, and given an opinion in the negative. He was not a rich man in those days. And for his eldest daughter—his heart's delight, as he used to call her—to marry into precarious circumstances was so distasteful to him that he forbade it altogether. He had told her so—when it was too late.

It is an hour of musing and of looking back into that sad irrevocable past. He sees her, his daughter, such as she was then, standing before him to hear his decree. Her hands clasped in entreaty—her eyes full of anguish and terror. He can hear her pleading voice; the echo comes to him, down the vista of all these years: "Do not tear us asunder, or our hearts will break!"

He was very proud—he has always been proud and stubborn. If it were so, and she could not give him up, he would have no runaway match to reflect disgrace on him. She should be married from her home, but never would he see her more. And he never had—never since she went away a bride; never since she came back, at the last moment, to make a final appeal, to pray for his blessing—his forgiveness. But he would not give it. He never had.

Yet do not blessings return on the head of the giver? Is not forgiveness Godlike?

A strange thought for him at this late hour, when obduracy has done its worst.

He shall never see her again. And he puts back the likeness and shuts up the drawer. Never, until—And then he shall see them both, Margaret and her husband. Like accusing spirits, they will rise up and testify against him. That day *must* come. Its solemn foot-fall sounds along the immeasurable lapse of ages. It *must* come, and it will.

If it were not too late, he thinks. For ever and anon a better feeling has stirred faintly in his breast, only to be crushed and quelled. If it were not too late, if she had not passed beyond the limits of human aid—he might, why should he not forgive?

Let him dwell on the word. There is a healing balm in it; bad passions sear the heart, and make the face old and rugged. Better impulses cause the desert place to blossom, even as the garden of the Lord?

Why should he not forgive, if only for the sake of the dear child he loves?

This is the link which is making itself felt. It is a bond of union between himself and Margaret. The child is dear to both of them.

Should he go? The house is very lonely. His mind is ill at ease; he wanders through the deserted rooms like some restless spirit; he can not resolve what to do. Sometimes he thinks he will go. It will be too late; he is afraid of that; but some tardy justice, some late honor might be wrung from him—if not to the living, to the dead.

A resolve, whether for good or evil, gathers impetus as it forms. He passed a sleepless

night. The old memories left him no peace. Their haunting voices sounded in his ears like the ceaseless murmur of the waves. Whichever way he looked there was Margaret.

Yes, he will go; Adela has left the address. Perhaps a vague wistful hope was in her mind as she did so. He knows the city to which she has gone; he had some business transaction there once, and the way is familiar to him. He will go. The resolution was not so sudden as it seemed. His obduracy had been slowly undermining, day by day, week by week, ever since he had taken to his heart Margaret's child.

Early the next morning he started on his journey. He was anxious and impatient. His mind was full of dark forebodings. The end of the journey was wrapped in gloom and uncertainty. He began secretly to pray that he might not find her dead.

Yonder is the crowded city, with its peopled thousands. Amid them all, one small group alone attracts him—his *children*.

He found the humble lodging where Margaret had taken refuge; he walked up and down before it, to recover his composure; he did not think he could have been so affected. The softer feelings had the mastery over him. He was yearning to embrace Margaret.

He did not ask for her, or mention her name. He asked for the lady who had arrived yesterday, meaning Adela; and he sat down until she should be summoned.

Very soon she came. It was strange, she thought, that she should receive a visitor here, and the visitor was not Mr. Howard, so the woman told her. How little did she hope to see her father!

"Papa—dear papa!"

It was all she said. She read the story in his face, and the full consolation of it rushed into her heart. She saw in his softened looks and tearful eyes that again her prayer had been answered—that he was come to see Margaret!

He did not speak; he was too greatly agitated. But she knew what to do. Oh! precious opportunity, come again at last! She held out her hand; her own tears fell fast.

"Dear papa, come!"

He took her hand submissively; there was a humility in his manner which touched her. She led him up the stairs. Would she have bartered away that pure drop of joy for all the world could give? Oh, never, never!

At the door of the room she stopped. Then, entering alone, she advanced towards the humble couch.

"Margaret!" and she bent fondly over her.

Margaret looked up. The little one was nestling close to her, its golden hair mingled with hers.

"Yes," she said, smiling and pressing again and again the tiny hand to her lips; "yes."

"Margaret! God has been very good to us. He has answered the prayer offered so long from both our hearts. He is bringing us great

happiness and peace at last. Margaret, here is our father."

A short interval, a hurried, agitated cry—a quick, eager footstep. The father was in the midst. He had taken her to his arms—to his love—to his forgiveness. His lost one; his Margaret!

Would she change now—she who looks on with tears of exquisite gladness? Does she regret the bitter past, the steep and narrow way? Would she have back her garish delights, her resplendent prospects, at the price of a broken faith—at the price of this? Would she even, at such a cost, have back her love? Oh, never, never!

Sweet reconciliation, dove-like peace! Thou hast not been bought too dearly. Brood over us forever!

## CHAPTER LXIII.

### JULIET MAKES UP HER MIND.

"Of course, Juliet, you will give the young man up?" said Squire Masterman, from his easy-chair by the fire, and looking at Juliet through his spectacles.

He could not see her face. She was standing in the middle of the room, her face towards the door. One white hand was clenched behind her, but she made no reply to her grandpapa's remark.

"Of course, you will give him up?" resumed the squire, in an easier tone, and after having paused a moment in the expectation that something would be said. "To tell you the truth, I am not so very sorry. He never was a suitable match for you, my dear."

The white hand clenched itself a trifle tighter; but she was still silent. Her silence emboldened him. This conversation had been carefully studied by him for more than a week, and it was with some degree of uncertainty that he entered upon it.

"I had always set my heart-upon your making a good match, my dear; and really when one thinks of what has occurred, and of how foolish you have been to let slip—"

The angry flush that dyed her neck and the imperious movement of the beautiful head stopped him. He changed his tactics.

"You see what it is to marry poverty in the case of your own parents, Juliet."

"I do," she said slowly and distinctly; "I do."

"Well, then, my dear," he resumed, in a brisker tone, and drawing a letter from his pocket—it had ventured half-way before, and been thrust back again—"well, then, of course, we need say nothing more on *that* head, need we?"

Silence again.

"So that I shall pass on," continued the squire, in rather a nervous and hurried manner, "to this—this—letter."

She gave a quick angry glance round. Then

she resumed her original position—her face away from him.

"It is really very handsome of—of—the baronet. He renews his offer, my dear, and you have only to say the word, and become Lady Crossland, of Crossland Hall."

A smile curled the handsome lip of Juliet, but she did not speak.

"You will not be mad enough to fling yourself away on a beggar," he said; "of course, if you do, I can not pretend—that is, it will be poverty, Juliet, absolute poverty."

She knew what he meant by that—that he would withhold her marriage portion.

At this very moment the servant announced "Mr. Ormond."

The old man frowned, and puckered up his face into an expression of intense disapprobation. Juliet neither smiled nor frowned, nor made any sign whatever.

Luke came in, the picture of a crestfallen and disappointed man. The death of Maude Sibley had not been made public; nor if it had, could he have guessed that his affairs would in any way be influenced by such a catastrophe.

His reception was not one which tended to soothe his feelings. The squire bowed coldly and distantly. He never offered his hand to the fallen man. No more did Juliet. Juliet did not even look at him.

Poor Luke! His lip trembled; he could scarce endure to utter the words; but when he had said a few of them his courage rose. In his simple integrity and truth he looked quite heroic.

"I have come," he said, "just to tell you, sir, that I do not venture on Miss Masterman's acceptance of me *now*. I am no fine speaker, and I can not put it in elegant language; but I love her too truly and earnestly to consent that she should share my broken fortunes, and the ruin which has overtaken me."

"Do you hear, Juliet? He releases you with his own lips;" and the old man turned to her with an air of triumph—"with his own lips!"

Luke did not pay the least attention to this speech. He was secretly hoping that Juliet would speak to him. But she stood with downcast eyes, and silent.

It was rather cruel, he thought, to let him go without one word—one look—so completely to forsake him!

And at the first signal. His own heart seemed rent in twain. Surely her love could not be so deep and abiding as his was.

The squire, meantime, was possessed with but one idea. He wished Luke well out of the house and gone. There was no positive assurance of safety so long as he remained on the premises.

After a pause, just for the sake of decent politeness, he hinted as much.

"Have you any thing more to say?" he asked, in a tone in which blandness and uneasiness were curiously mingled.

"No, nothing," replied Luke, moving slowly away. "I only thought I should like once more—" Juliet," added he, in a tone of sharp distress, "will you not say good-bye?"

"Miss Masterman is wise not to try and get up a scene," said the old man, hurriedly. "She knows what my wishes are, and is behaving with remarkable discretion. Good-morning to you, sir. You see the young lady has accepted your generous release—that she gives you up."

"No!" exclaimed Juliet, coming suddenly forward, and speaking with an energy that startled both of them; "no; I do not give him up!"

"Why, Juliet—"

But she would not let him say another word.

"Luke—dear Luke," continued she, going towards him, "my love is not, as you think, an idle bawble, to be given to-day and withdrawn to-morrow. When you won it, dear, it was yours once and for all. True, the sun was shining then, and now has come the storm! Never mind, whate'er betides, we will brave it, dear, *together—together!*"

"Juliet, what can you be dreaming of? You are mad, you foolish girl!" cried the old man, rising as if to part them.

Plain, homely, phlegmatic Luke! He caught her to his heart, and let him part them who dared.

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### SIR FREDERICK AT A DISADVANTAGE.

"If you please, my orders was not to admit nobody," said Peggy, stolidly, and holding the door in her hand, while she confronted Sir Frederick Morton.

"Oh, but if you take in my card, I think—I feel sure that Mr.—that Miss Ormond will see me," said the baronet, hurriedly, and attempting to press forward.

Peggy stood a moment. Then she yielded the point, and allowed him to pass.

Arrived in the passage, he stopped.

"Where shall I find Miss Ormond?" asked he of Peggy, who was closing the door and fastening it, as though the house were in a state of siege.

Peggy's reply was to open a door on the right. Then pointing expressively to Sir Frederick, she vanished into the kitchen, as if she had no desire to be further seen in the matter.

Sir Frederick had, for once, made up his mind what to do. He went straight into the room without his usual irresolution. It was quite clear what had been the drift of Mr. Sibley's policy. He had been, at that gentleman's instigation, to a remote part of his estate, where the agent assured him that some matters of business urgently demanded his attention.

This was a ruse, he felt convinced, to get him out of the way. During his absence information had reached him as to what Sibley was doing.

All the time he had been harassed by doubts

and suspicions. All the time he had been secretly desiring to get rid of Sibley.

He had only just come from the station. He had not been home, or seen or heard any thing of Sibley. He had come straight to Kate Ormond.

She looks upon him as a traitor. She feels the utmost contempt for a man who does not know his own mind.

He saw the change. Considering all things, she was hardly likely to regard him with favor. Her favor had to be *won*.



LET HIM PART THEM WHO DARED.

She had occupied his mind far more than the business on which Mr. Sibley had sent him.

There she is. She looks very downcast and sorrowful. The subdued expression enhances her beauty, he thinks, sevenfold.

Unfortunately it does not last. The moment she sees him it vanishes clean away.

"I'm afraid, Miss Ormond," he began, feeling at a great disadvantage, and that her piercing eye was searching out his weak points, "I am afraid you are offended with me—that you think—"

"What I think is of very little consequence," she replied, with a slight toss of her pretty head;

"the matter is more serious as it lies between yourself and your conscience."

It would never do to go on in this way. It was leading miles away from the point he intended to aim at.

"I have travelled all night in my eagerness to return to the spot. I am distressed beyond measure at the steps Mr. Sibley has dared to adopt."

That answered better. He saw at once that her severity was a trifle moderated. As regarded any reflection cast on Mr. Sibley, there was a point in common.

She forbore to put in any of her cutting speeches. Indeed, she allowed him to go on. He rallied his courage then. Having gained a vantage-ground, wonderful to relate, he kept it! With far more coherence than he had as yet displayed, he told her the position he was in; that he was as much convinced as ever that the debt was paid, and Sibley's motives were now clear to him. He should never forgive his behavior in this unhappy affair. And what, he concluded, with an earnestness that was quite touching, would Miss Ormond advise him to do?"

She smiled, half in pity and half in scorn.

"I am not capable of advising," she said, "because I can not realize what it is to be undecided. I always know the thing I mean to do, and I do it."

"But all persons are not so highly gifted as you are, Miss Ormond," he said in a conciliatory tone. "Whatever embarrassment," added he after a pause, "you may be thrown into by this—this—"

"Nefarious transaction," suggested Kate.

"Well—well! call it what you like!" and again he quailed under the piercing severity of her black eye—"you need be under no anxiety. I am here to offer you any accommodation—that is, in money," stammered he, conscious that the eye was probing into his very soul; "any sum that you choose to name—"

"Thank you," interrupted Kate, icily; "if we are driven to an arrangement of that kind, it would be safer to deal with a person on whose word we can rely."

"You are very severe, Miss Ormond. Shall I never induce you to be friends?"

"Excuse me if I fail to see the necessity," she replied, still cold as ice.

After that, what could he do but depart? It all came of his hateful indecision. Indecision might lead a man to do as much harm as crime.

He went sorrowfully home. He could not remedy the mischief, let him try as he might.

A note lay upon the table of his room. He took it up and opened it mechanically. He was thinking all the time of Kate Ormond.

A paper dropped from the envelope. As he read it, his face turned crimson with the suddenness of the surprise.

It was the very thing he would have almost given his life to find—the loss of which had occasioned all this confusion. From whence it

came he knew not. It might have dropped from the clouds.

But here, in black and white, was the missing receipt—the acknowledgment, duly attested and signed, that the debt was paid.

He stood a moment like a man in a dream. Then he snatched up his hat and hurried down the stairs. He was on his way back to the Meadow Farm.

## CHAPTER LXV.

### RUTH'S EXTREMITY.

WHEN step after step has been taken from the right path, it is difficult to find the way back.

Ruth found it so. Her course had led her into a tangled maze, from which there seemed at present no chance of extrication.

This was a conclusion which she had anticipated. In her heart she had relied on her husband's reception of her. Where was her home? where was she to go?

She knew how faulty she had been. Repentance was setting in, now it was too late.

She bethought herself of his gentleness, his forbearance, his tenderness, displayed to the very last. She recollected how happy she might have been—how safe—how beloved! But she had not been willing. In her reckless folly she had cast away the priceless jewel of domestic felicity, and it was gone.

The greedy waves seemed to have swallowed it up!

She was more friendless now than ever, and she wept as she thought of it. Her ruined house, plucked down by her own hands, she could never hope to rebuild.

Of all the people she had ever known, who would stand by her in this extremity?

Surely, if Mrs. Mudford knew, she would.

There was a strange pertinacity in Ruth's nature. She clung still to her friend.

The next morning she walked by the house, in the faint hope of seeing Mrs. Mudford again; and she was not disappointed. Before long that lady came bustling up to the door on her return from shopping.

Ruth caught her by the hand.

"Oh, Mrs. Mudford! he is gone—he is gone!"

Mrs. Mudford plucked away her hand in excedding wrath.

"What! you again, Ruth! I told you I did not mean to encourage you."

"But he is gone," repeated Ruth in tears, and speaking in a tone of keen distress; "my husband has left the town."

"I can't help that; you should not have driven him away. Let go my dress, if you please; I can not stop talking here."

With which remark Mrs. Mudford went into her house and shut herself away from Ruth, as it seemed, forever.

Ruth's discipline was beginning. She had

been going on frowardly, and now she was filled with the bitterness of her own ways.

The rattle of a pair of ponies made her start. Coming down the street was a person she had always tried to avoid—had treated with the utmost rudeness. Her husband's friend, Miss Easton.

"Your Miss Easton, and your Mrs. Jules," she had been accustomed to say.

Now she would have avoided Adela again, this time from shame and guilty confusion; but she could not. The ponies stopped, and Miss Easton had alighted and was coming towards her.

"Mrs. Vincent—I am so glad!"

The cordial tone, the kind eye, the air of friendliness and sympathy, were too much for Ruth; she burst into tears.

"I am so glad!" resumed Adela, taking her hand, "because I am sure you can have but one motive in visiting East Bramley. Is it not so? To return to your husband?"

There are some who drive out the weak and halting from the flock, others who gather them tenderly back.

Of the latter class was Adela. She had read the story in the young wife's face. She saw grief, repentance, care, sorrow—all in legible characters; and her hand was the first to be stretched out, her voice was the first to welcome. Yet she was the "proud, stuck-up Miss Easton," whom Ruth had so detested.

Ruth's heart was softened, and instead of rejecting Adela, it clung to her.

She was a friend born for adversity.

"How could I ever have disliked her?" thought Ruth, as she gazed into the kind and benignant face, which seemed to shine upon her from behind the cloud. "Ah! that was one of my sins!"

And perhaps—a happy thought flashed into her mind—perhaps Miss Easton could tell her some news of her husband. She asked her eagerly.

Adela looked grave a moment.

"You know that Mr. Vincent has left East Bramley."

"Oh, yes—yes!"

And Ruth hung her head for shame.

"He has written once to papa. Should you like to have the address?"

Ruth clasped her hands eagerly. She had no need to speak.

"I will send it at once to the place where you are staying. Of course—" and Adela hesitated—"of course you—"

"Oh, yes!" cried Ruth, smiling through her tears; "I know what you mean, and I shall do it. I shall go to him at once."

to a fluttering expectation. Uppermost in her mind was the thought that she was about to return to Horace. Where Horace was, there was safety, peace, and happiness. Of the outward circumstances by which he might be surrounded she thought little. With the whole power of her woman's love, and skill, and tact, she would set herself to aid and abet him in all his undertakings. She would go *with*, not *against* him. There should be the bond of union, which is also the bond of strength.

She had made every preparation to start as soon as possible. Her luggage was ready, her bonnet on. She would not delay a moment when once she had the address.

It came, and she seized it with eager hands.

Horace, then, had gone to London. He had sunk in his position, as the little town of East Bramley would chatteringly observe. He was simply a clerk in an office. It had been *her* doing, and a keen pang of remorse smote her. *Her* willfulness, *her* extravagance, *her* obstinacy. She had pulled him down. She had no one to blame but herself.

Never mind! she would go to him. She would strain every nerve to repair the past.

"Now I have my face homeward," she said, as the train at length started. "Where Horace is must be my home."

London—smoky, noisy, crowded, wonderful!—she had never seen it before, or heard the din of its many voices. Every face, every sight was strange to her. But she did not mind. She held the scrap of paper tightly in her hand as though it was a talisman to ward off danger. It was, indeed, her only clue amid the labyrinth.

She was soon speeding towards his abode. Her heart fluttered, and her voice failed her, when at length the right number was reached, and the cab stopped at the door.

"If you please, I am come to see Mr. Vincent. I am his wife," said Ruth, timidly, to the woman who opened the door, and who regarded her with some surprise.

"Oh, indeed! but Mr. Vincent is not at home," replied the woman, still looking at Ruth with no very friendly aspect.

"Never mind. I will go to his room, if you please," continued Ruth, stepping into the hall.

"It's on the third floor, to the right," replied the woman, curtly.

Up the three pair of uncarpeted, desolate-looking stairs Ruth toiled. The room occupied by Mr. Vincent was reached at last. Ruth sat down on the little sofa, and burst into tears.

She was thoroughly unnerved by the excitement and the alternation of hope and fear that came in rapid succession.

Every thing around brought Horace more vividly to her mind. There were a few relics of home, which it made her heart ache to see. There was the group of wax flowers. Did he preserve them for her sake? How she wished she had never touched them! Their very beauty seemed to reproach her.

She took off her bonnet, and smoothed her

## CHAPTER LXVI.

### THE BOND OF UNION THE BOND OF STRENGTH.

Ruth hurried back to the inn in a state of excitement such as she had not felt for a long time. The dull aching at her heart gave place



soft glossy hair. Her young face and girlish presence brightened up the room. When he came back it should not be, as before, to solitude. He should find a loving and affectionate wife.

Hark! Is that some one at the door below—some one who opens it, and comes in—up the staircase, step by step—nearer and nearer? Can it be her husband?

Her cheek glows, her eyes are bright with expectation. She trembles too. Will the step pass, and go higher up—or will it stop—or was it possible she could be mistaken in it?

It stops. She draws herself away a little, and he comes in without perceiving her. What a careworn, haggard face! What sorrow is in it! What traces of watchfulness and suspense!

She can forbear not an instant longer. She comes forward, eager and trembling.

"Horace, my husband!"

At first his face expressed nothing but surprise. Then came the look of stern displeasure she had so dreaded—the look of a man who had been deeply injured. Nor did he approach her with any sign of joy, or, in this first moment, even hold out his hand.

But she did not mean that it should end thus. It was in her mind to restore to him the happiness he had lost; not merely to weep tears of vain regret, but to be up and doing.

She knelt before him; her attitude could not be too humble, or too full of conciliation. She knew far better than he could tell her how great her mischief or her folly had been. Tears streamed from her eyes. She was deeply, truly penitent.

"Horace, I am come to ask you to take me back! Forgive me, my husband!—forgive me!"

Her imploring look softened him. He had never ceased to love her. His heart had yearned towards her many a time. But the sting of her misconduct rankled yet.

"Do you know, Ruth," he said, gravely, as he raised her from her kneeling posture, "the amount of mischief you have done me? If not, look round and see."

"I do!—I do!" replied she, weeping. "It is all my fault. I ought to have built you up, and not pulled you down. Oh, Horace! can you not forgive me? Will you not let me try once more to make you happy?"

Happy! He thought it was a sound gone by, never to come again. His home had been broken up, his hearth made desolate. She had done it all; he could not stand his ground when she was gone, and the buzz of evil tongues raised ceaseless clamor in his ears. Her extravagance had all but ruined him. He had not the heart to stem the torrent—to live the matter down in East Bramley. He had made his escape, let it cost what it might, and hidden himself in the vast solitude of London. He had never thought of home again. He would live here alone, a wrecked and disappointed man.

Now she had returned to him—the wife who

had been so rebellious. She was changed as well as he was; her face was sharp and pinched; much of her youthful bloom departed; she, too, had suffered greatly. And how young she was! He repeated that old and well-worn excuse even now.

Should he forgive her? Should he take her to his heart? Should he begin afresh, taught by a bitter experience? Was it possible that love, and peace, and union, and prosperity should all come at last?

We think it will. We know that, step by step, return is made from this devious, crooked path; that care and diligence, and patient perseverance will overcome the difficulties of the way; that union will bring strength; that another home will arise out of these ruins, whose foundations will be firmer and more enduring than the last.

Judgment will not then need to be silenced or hoodwinked. It will approve, and not condemn.

## CHAPTER LXVII.

### THE CHANGES TIME HAS MADE.

Two years had passed, and the little town of East Bramley had seen many of those changes incident to a lapse of time, whether of long or short duration.

The old vicarage-house, gray and moss-grown, has been put into thorough repair for a new incumbent.

This gentleman arrived some few months ago; his name is Reuben Howard. The influence of his friend, Mr. Easton, had procured him the living, and never was influence used for a better purpose.

For once, the various cliques in East Bramley were united. There was but one opinion, and that a golden opinion, about Reuben Howard.

He was in his study one morning reading, when the door opened, and a quiet little person entered—so quiet, so humble, that we are carried far back in our story—to the time when Amy Howard was the humble companion of Lady Peters.

Reuben was used to these visits. Almost every day, at some hour or other, that little figure would glide in. She had not much to say, or, if she had, she repressed it. She had a worn and faded look, as if all the youth were dying out of her; but she never complained. She would creep to the fire and sit down, leaning her head on her hand.

He knew what it all meant. East Bramley tongues were never tired of talking about it.

This time she did not take the seat. She stood by the fire, looking into it as if lost in thought. She was a neglected wife—he knew that. His heart swelled to see how shabby she had become—how unlike the trim, well-dressed Amy of earlier days. Report said that poverty, if not ruin, was coming on the thriftless, volatile Sidney Peters.



All at once she spoke. "Reuben," and she raised her sorrowful eyes to her brother; he had come to her, and was standing by her—"we shall do no good, dear, in East Bramley."

"Why not, Amy?"

"We shall not," she said with a stifled sigh; "and Sidney knows it now. He says it is because his mother—"

She hid her face in her hands, and wept bitterly for a few moments. Then she became more calm. "His mother will not forgive him. He has tried again and again to persuade her, but she will not."

"Yes!" said the busy tongues which were always wagging, "yes, and poor Mrs. Peters has a hard time of it! Her husband visits it all on her head."

"Sidney's profession has been a losing game," continued Amy, with a sad smile. "He is wearied of the confinement. He says he was never cut out for the law."

"What then?" asked Reuben, abruptly; but he checked himself. He had never allowed himself to express an opinion, in Amy's presence, touching her husband.

"At any rate, he has given it up, and Mr. Vincent is coming back, and will take his place. We are going to leave the town."

She spoke calmly, but a moment after she was sobbing in her brother's arms.

He had been prepared for this some time past, but when it came it seemed not the less bitter.

"Dear Reuben," said she, presently, when he had soothed her to some kind of composure, "I know it was all wrong—that I set my heart too much on this thing. I have learnt many a bitter lesson since then, Reuben."

He made no reply, but he gently stroked the fair curls that lay on his breast.

What could he say? He knew that such a passionate, idolatrous affection must die in sorrow; he had known it from the first. That troubled, boisterous stream was unlike the waters of peace.

"I have comfort, dear," she resumed; "I have found it many and many a time. Do you remember that Book you gave me?"

"Yes, Amy."

"I kept my word, Reuben. I have never missed reading in it day by day. I can never be happy any more with this world's gladness; but, dear, I have found peace."

There was a deep solemnity in her tone as she said the words. How changed she was! how utterly unlike the impulsive, reckless Amy, who would have Sidney, or die!

Her visit has come to an end; but ere the little figure glides out again, patient and uncomplaining, he has something to tell her.

It is not very easy to tell; he is obliged to whisper, with averted face, and the shyness almost of a girl.

"Amy, I am going to be married."

The news did not surprise her in the least; it only made her smile through her tears.

"I am so glad, Reuben! I wish you all happiness! I know who she is—that dear Miss Easton!"

He bowed his head in acquiescence. His was not a love like Amy's, or Sidney's either; it was strong, and calm, and good—a love worthy of the heart of Reuben Howard.

#### THE CONCLUSION.

My story must be finished rapidly. First, a word about Margaret. She is living with her father in happiness and content, and with them, the darling of both their hearts, the golden-haired Ethel.

Margaret has recovered her health, and no one would recognize, in the well-dressed and handsome woman, the miserable mother who fled away from East Bramley an outcast and a fugitive. She is her father's sole companion now, for, one bright spring morn, Reuben Howard came and fetched away Adela.

Mr. Sibley has long left the town; he secretly took his departure the day after his daughter's funeral. His misdeeds were blazoned from one end of the place to the other. One single act of justice rendered his memory less odious than it would otherwise have been. He had found the missing receipt among his daughter's papers, and had sent it to Sir Frederick.

Lady Peters did not find it possible to keep undisputed possession of the Tower. Sir Frederick, much to her indignation, chose to bring home a wife.

The courtship had been a tedious one, and had many fluctuations. Though Kate Ormond was the most decided character in the neighborhood, she did not all at once come to a satisfactory conclusion.

This, she said, was owing to her experience of Sir Frederick's disposition. "He may alter his opinion any day," she was accustomed to observe. And even on the wedding morning she was heard to ask the question, "Are you sure, my dear Frederick, that you know your own mind?"



~~227, 35, 12,~~

~~273, 11, 18,~~  
~~441, 8, 8,~~

~~379, 6, 31,~~

~~411, 16, 4,~~  
~~488, 25, 13,~~

~~626, 34, 9,~~

20
16
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4
56

~~245, 32, 14,~~

~~245, 32, 14,~~



"After staring until my eyes ached."

S P I C Y.

*A NOVEL.*

BY

MRS. MARTHA J. LAMB.

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.*

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TO  
MARY E. WHITE,  
IN MEMORY OF AN UNSPEAKABLE GOOD,  
THIS VOLUME  
IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.





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# S P I C Y.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HOUSE HUNTING.

WE moved on the 1st of May, 1862.

On that pivot hung my destiny.

Otherwise my crazy bark might never have drifted upon the sea of letters.

On one of the last days of April, prior to that date a little more than a twelve-month, Leonardus had donned a spick-span-new suit of army gray, shouldered his rifle and gone to the wars.

During the summer that followed I consoled myself in manufacturing have-lacks and attending soldiers' aid societies; but when the dark, cold, long-to-be-remembered winter sprang upon me I found no choice of occupations, but was compelled to turn all my energies into the effort to keep the temperature in our elegant white stone palace on the avenue above freezing-point. A growing distaste for frescoed walls, high ceilings, and plate glass, culminated one day, while the mercury was fifteen degrees below zero, and a northeast gale blowing almost as hard within doors as without, by my wrapping myself up and setting out on a house-hunting expedition.

A few blocks above us stood a queer, old-fashioned cottage, whose geography was not written upon the face of it. It was in the centre of eight or ten full-sized city lots, shaded by some large leafy trees, and by the pretentious edifices of the Garden City of the West. I can hardly account for the subtle influence which induced me to turn my head in passing, but a great staring poster—To LET—upon the front-door caused me to push wide open the rickety gate, and pick my way up the icy walk, which was being swept clean of snow by the fitful gusts. I gave the bell a slippery jerk, and the handle separated from its wire and adhered fast to my glove. It had done its work, however, for a little, sallow-faced woman came to the door, and, in answer to my apologies and inquiries, took me through the house. It was snug and homelike. I was struck particularly by the noticeable absence of the so-called modern improvements.

"No furnace!—no speaking-tubes!—no dumb-waiters! How pleasant!" I remarked to the woman.

She looked at me in astonishment, and I explained.

"I have had a surfeit of those things, and choose to dispense with them altogether. I seek now for personal comfort. Can the house be made warm with stoves and grates?"

"Oh, yes, if you don't mind buying a large quantity of coal. It takes seven-teen tons for the season, or somewhere about that quantity."

"Seventeen tons only! Why, I shall not burn a coal-hod less than thirty-five tons where I am now, and I have not been free from a shiver since the 1st of November. I'll take the house."

"You have not seen it all yet."

"It don't matter as long as I am satisfied."

I went directly home, and wrote a note to the real-estate agents who had the property in charge, which resulted, a week or so later, in my signing a lease, and congratulating myself upon the ease I had acquired in the transaction of business.

Among other things, I negotiated for a series of repairs, and, as the spring advanced, workmen were to be seen as thick as bees on the premises. I stepped in once or twice to learn progress, and was informed by the "boss" that the place would be ready for me at least a week before moving-day. Thus I rested.

Some friends from Albany paid me an unexpected visit about that time. I was desirous of showing them every possible attention, as they had never been West before, and consequently took them to see all the lions, from the top of the court-house to the Artesian well, and devoted our evenings to a round of entertainments. They left on an Eastern-bound train at ten o'clock the night before the 1st of May.

As I was pulling out my hair-pins preparatory to retiring to rest, I gave my first serious attention to the moving of to-morrow—a new experience for me; and ignorance was unquestionably bliss. "It will be no great affair," I soliloquized. "Handy, good-natured draymen will do the work. They will wheel out sofas, chairs, tables, beds, etc., put them on large carts, pull up carpets and pile on the top, lay pictures anywhere on soft places, tie books up in blankets, pack clothes in trunks and bureau drawers, and tuck clocks, vases, and ornaments in waste corners—" I was in bed by the time I got to corners, and fell asleep, and dreamed I was moving by telegraph, and that my silver tea-set and a half a dozen lounges were galloping along astride the wires.

I was waked by the bursting into the room of my sixteen-year-old sister Spicy, with a little scream of surprise at my tardiness.

"What, not up! Why, it has been broad daylight for an hour! My trunk is packed; I've taken the curtains down in my room, and made a bag for the cat."

Just then the breakfast-bell rang.

"Go down, please, and pour the coffee, and say I will be there presently," I remarked, hurrying at my toilet.

"Who shall I address, since there is not a soul but you and I to sit at the first table?"

"Surely, we are alone again. But you may tell Myra to be getting things ready in the kitchen, and Maggie, instead of stopping to wait on the table, had better go for the wagons."

"And that other person—have you no orders for her?"

"No. Her head is worth a dozen of mine in an emergency. I shall be more likely to go to her before the day is over for directions. But what makes you persist in calling her *that other person*? Why don't you say Nursy Brown, as I do?"

"Because Brown is such a common name, and she seems such an uncommon person. There it is again! *Person* must be the word. I can't say *woman*, because that would sound so much older than she really is. I can't say *girl*, for that, I think, would sound as much too young, and not apply at all; and of course she isn't a lady, or she wouldn't be out at service. By the way, where did you pick her up?"

"She called here one rainy morning, almost a year ago, and applied for the situation. I had been wishing to make a change for some time, but had postponed the evil day, and this seemed a good opportunity for doing so without giving myself extra trouble. She had no references, so I took her on trial. She has remained ever since, and I like her for many reasons, but mostly because she is an American, and so quiet and unpretending, and capable withal. She told me to call her Nursy Brown; I don't even know her first name."

"How strange not to have asked! I should have wanted to know if for no other reason only because she did not out with it in the first place. What did you say a spell ago about my pouring your coffee?"

"No matter. I am just ready to go down myself now;" for, whatever my faults, it is one of my cardinal virtues to dress quickly, and, buttoning my cuffs as

I ran, I preceded Spicy to the dining-room.

It was a well-ordered breakfast that smoked its greeting, and we did ample justice to every article on the table, and sipped our coffee with as much negligent ease as if a change of base were not in contemplation. When we were quite through I was summoned to the culinary regions.

"What is all this?" I asked, stopping on the threshold of the kitchen, like an exclamation point in the middle of a sentence.

"Nothing, ma'am, only I am getting things ready, as Miss Spicy said."

"I should think as much!"

The room was literally piled with boxes, buckets, barrels, kettles, and every other conceivable jimcrack that could be found in a country grocery!

"I have some empty barrels here, and shall I pack in them?" asked Myra.

"Yes, you may as well. Put these jars in first and get them out of the way."

There were twenty-five of them; but they proved awkward things to pack, especially in a barrel! I helped. We tried them first on one side, then on the other, upside down and downside up, and at last stored away six!

Myra looked perplexed! "I do wish they would not make these things hollow," she said.

"So do I; but you must stuff in plates, bottles, frying-pans, and platters, and try to fill up the chinks. Manage it some way, I have all I can do up-stairs," and, having given the intelligible direction, I left hastily.

"Where shall I put the crockery?"

asked Maggie, anxiously, as I flew through the dining-room.

Bright's crib stood in the little hall ready for its journey.

"Here, this will do, and then there was the hamper and the clothes-basket."

"Medley! Medley! come here!" cried Spicy from the front door.

I don't know what I ever did that I must have been punished with such a name! I think it was wrong, whatever my offence, to have fastened it upon me, a helpless, inexperienced infant! How am I to know what a potent influence it may have had upon my whole character during my eventful earthly history! And another thing that cuts me, it is hardly ever pronounced in full except on occasions like this! I am called Meddie, ordinarily.

"Only think!" Spicy went on, as I obeyed her summons, "these men say they can't wait a minute, for they have ever so many jobs on hand, and that you must be a funny woman to send for them before your packing is done!"

"Go right up-stairs and begin taking out the furniture and carpets," I said quietly. "We sha'n't detain you many minutes."

Up they went, two great, brawny, red-faced men, and I appointed Spicy doorkeeper extraordinary to their highnesses.

Before following them, I looked into the parlor long enough to see Nursy Brown tying up my crimson satin chairs in their covers, and folding rugs and tidies with mathematical exactness. Little Bright, perched on the sofa among his toys, shook his patent rattlebox and crewed, and I could but stop to give him

a chapter of hugs and kisses. It did not binder me, so I thought, yet when I got to my room I found it in the wildest disorder. The bed had been taken out, the carpet ripped up, and grim dust was holding high carnival. My Saratoga trunk had moved—empty.

It was not a season for lamentations, so I made the most of the receptacles that remained. Alas, for my unlucky wardrobe! I folded for once without regard to creases, and squeezed every thing into the smallest compass. I jumbled cuffs, collars, perfumery-bottles, camphor, and overshoes, into one compartment together, and hustled whisks, brooms, hair-brushes, and match-safes, into the box with my best bonnet, and what would not go in anywhere else I tied up in a sheet.

Seven loads! when I thought there would be only two or three! And lastly, the odds and ends. They were the most bulky of all my possessions. Such a quantity of bottles and jars I am sure never graced any other mansion!

"Why didn't we think to send them back to the grocery?" remarked Myra, after they were stacked up on two carts and pretty generally cracked.

"Or, we might have left them altogether, since the cost of the whole lot could not equal the price I am paying per load for their moving," I remarked, dryly.

Thus we grow in wisdom through many difficulties.

At ten minutes past four in the afternoon we took possession of my new house, or, more correctly speaking, my old house, for a portion of it, one of its many wings, was the veritable shanty



which first saw the light when the great city was a little fur station. Spicy had ridiculed my choice, could not understand how I could "descend from an elevated marble front into such a coop," ever since she first learned of my intention, and her exclamation as she stepped upon the veranda coincided with her previously-expressed views:

"It is a piece of Noah's steamboat washed ashore! Tell me the truth, were these doors and windows manufactured since the flood?"

After a hopeless effort to climb over a pile of mattresses which had been left directly before the door, she called out to know how she was going to get inside.

"Wait a moment and I will remove those things," said Nursy Brown from the top of the stairs.

I was behind Spicy. She turned quickly and looked at me:

"What a sweet voice! It just magnetizes me. Do you know, Medley—"

"Call me Meddie, darling, on to-day of all days! Medley is too suggestive."

"I will," said Spicy, laughing. "But what I was about to say was, that I am beginning to think that *person* is some princess in disguise."

"How absurd!"

"Not so very absurd, either. She is all wound up in mystery, and her name fits her badly."

"How so?"

"Have you to ask? can't you see that hideous cap she wears drawn down over her forehead as well as I? Have you never looked into her magnificent eyes? or remarked her beautiful teeth?"

"Certainly; but what of that? I see even more. She is a nursery maid whose

good qualities in her particular sphere render her invaluable. But as for her beauty, it has not yet struck me. Indeed, I regard her as excessively plain."

"With that head-gear truly so. Oh, dear! Chaos exaggerated!—what a looking place!"

We had at last crossed the threshold of my future home, and stood in the middle room, with the curious bay-window, which I had marked out as my future library. Every thing had been dumped in there pell-mell. The refrigerator stood up near the mantel, piled to the ceilings with pictures and parcels! The piano was covered with platters, pokers, and washboards; my elegant inlaid cabinet was lying on its back under a pile of chairs. My library table, top downward, supported one of the servants' trunks, and my two-hundred-dollar lace curtains were wrapped around the molasses jug.

We both stared aghast! A moment after Spicy tripped up the stairs on a tour of investigation. Presently she called me to come too, and having no where else to go I obeyed. We could scarcely get into the rooms, for my bureaux were all placed in a row in one of the halls.

"This is the very oddest pattern of a building!" said Spicy, looking about.

We soon came to another flight of stairs, just like those in front, which descended into a spacious hall, opening through a glass-door upon a graveled walk to the north gate of the grounds.

"Now, I smell romance in the air," exclaimed Spicy, pretending to make a telescope of her two hands.

I laid my hand just then upon a side door, which I had not before seen, and

revealed to our surprise an immense pantry! In it bedsteads and trunks were heaped promiscuously!

"When will wonders cease?" I asked.

"Can't say," replied Spicy.

We went outside, wandered round the house where there was green turf to step on, and at last came in through the laundry and kitchen.

"Tack! tack! tack! Who's nailing down carpets?" asked Spicy.

"Nursy Brown, ma'am," replied Myra. "She's getting a room ready for you to stay in while we regulate and prepare something to eat."

"Splendid!" cried Spicy. "I am hungry enough to eat a hard-shell Baptist. Well, well, Meddie, if here isn't your baby asleep in a champagne basket! You dear, precious, darling, liltlesweetie," and, before I could throw in a remonstrance, the thoughtless girl had buried her face among his clustering curls to kiss him, and he waked.

He was not going to be defrauded of his accustomed nap, which had been postponed to such a late hour, without a protest, and set up a scream which brought Nursy Brown flying to the spot before either of us had time to turn round. She knelt down, spoke softly to the little cherub, kissed him, turned him over upon his side, and hushed him back to his dreams.

"That was my naughty work," said Spicy, "but I could not help it; sure as I live and breathe and hope to die the next minute, I couldn't. He is too enticing a subject altogether. Better put him away out of my sight."

"I have the blue-room, over the north hall, almost ready for you; perhaps you

had better go up and lay your things off there, and I will bring you some chairs presently," remarked Nursy Brown.

I thanked my good angel and departed.

"The *blue-room*, indeed!" exclaimed Spicy, pausing before the open door.

It was in the shape of a triangle, with a slanting ceiling on one side. The walls were hung with a fanciful blue paper. The carpet just laid was a piece of my old Wilton, with a blue ground, and the blue matched the paper with pretty effect. The bed-room suite was blue medallion on satinwood, one that I had purchased the previous year for another and entirely different apartment. It had been chosen for the blue-room, with an eye to the admirable fitness of things, and was neatly arranged for our immediate convenience.

I looked over Spicy's shoulder in blank amazement! Then I remembered how I had not seen the whole house before renting it. I stepped in, glanced around, and then went to the window, which had a pleasant view of flowers and shrubbery in the yard.

"Where does this door go to?" asked Spicy.

She had crossed the room and was trying to open what seemed to be the upper half of a door of a very antique pattern, and adjusted to the outside of the wall without casings or panels. Just as I turned my head her efforts were rewarded, and so unexpectedly to her, that she came near being precipitated headlong down three or four steep steps into a sharp-pointed gable-roofed room with a snowy-white pine floor. It was dimly lighted by a diminutive square four-paned glass window at the far end, over which

clambering grape-vines from the arbor below had improvised a curious blind.

"Why, it is the closet belonging to this room, I suppose," was my reply.

Spicy crowded herself in and I followed.

"I'll tell you what it reminds me of: the old minister's postscript, which was always longer than the letter itself," she said, smiling.

"Just the place for storing trunks," I remarked, after fitting my head into the widened space about the ridge-pole so that I could stand upright.

"How could you get them in? I see no place but that little hole in the wall which has just admitted us, and a close fit at that. No, Meddie. I see how it is. This is the ghost department. I am not going to sleep in the blue-room for one."

I laughed.

"We are in the attic of the laundry, darling. Can't you see where it is joined to the main building? It was once, no doubt, the well-to-do chamber of an early settler, who expanded as the city grew and built on."

There was a pile of rubbish in one corner, and I crouched under the slanting roof to see of what it was composed. Some old yellow manuscripts appertaining to law, a copy of "Barnes's Notes on the Gospels," "The History of Scotland," a pamphlet on natural history, two or three old *Harper's Magazines*, some *New York Observers*, and lastly, and, as it proved, by no means leastly, a bundle of letters tied neatly together with a piece of red tape.

"Spiritual crumbs! Fragments from ghostdom! What! are you going to

take them out from here?" exclaimed Spicy.

"Yes. They will serve for our evening's entertainment, possibly."

"But they may be full of secrets which we ought never to know!"

"If of any very grave importance they would not have been thrown away, in my opinion."

"Oh, we can't tell, Meddie. Somebody may have lost or forgotten them. It don't seem right to read them, any how."

"Nonsense, Spicy! You are tired and dyspeptic. What can there be wrong about it? My conscience is perfectly easy on the subject."

"But the very look at them gives me the creeps all up and down my back. See how I tremble;" and she put her hand in mine.

"You are a goosey," I said, pinching her cheeks.

Myra appeared with a waiter of tea and toast and cold boiled tongue, and we forgot all else in our greediness. Fifteen minutes later we gathered up the crumbs and the empty dishes, set them out in the hall, and declared ourselves greatly refreshed.

Myra looked in again presently to say: "Nursy Brown wishes the ladies to stay up here until every thing is fixed up and righted down stairs. Here are your matches, ma'am, for the gas when the daylight is over."

"That is a nurse worth having, Meddie. I should keep her always, and then will and bequeath her to my sister, if I were you," exclaimed Spicy.

I was just dropping into an easy-chair, which had been placed in the room by

unseen hands, when Spicy threw the package of letters at me.

"Do find out what they are as quick as possible; I know we shall both be sorry for it, but I sha'n't rest until it is over. They are in a gentleman's hand."

"I thought they were in my hand."

"You just notice, Meddie, those p's, and the loops of the g's. They are certainly masculine."

"I didn't know that letters of the alphabet had any gender." ●

She came to me, pulled out one of the letters and commenced its examination.

"He signs himself 'G. G.' Did you ever hear that conundrum, 'Why is the letter g like death?'"

"No, Spicy. Why?"

"'Because it makes ghosts of hosts, and is always in the middle of slaughter.'"

"Do look at this letter. It is as thick as a small book, and as full of romance as an egg is of meat. I've seen the word *love* twice!"

I took it from her hand, smiling. It was in a bold type of penmanship, not handsome, and very closely lined. It was a reply to the questionings of a friend, and the subject was of the most delicate character. The writer, from certain allusions, had evidently offered himself previously to his fair correspondent, and her decision remained in abeyance. Meanwhile he had been called upon for a chapter in his earlier history, and after some apparent hesitation it had been produced.

I read aloud —

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

"As I told you, Helen, I completed my sophomore year in Williams College in the summer of 1852. I think you are already familiar with some of the peccadilloes of my college life, and now I will acquaint you with what occurred on the memorable moonless evening previous to that commencement.

"I had distinguished myself some weeks before by mapping out a novel parade over the burial of Euclid, which had so taken with the boys that I had been elected chairman of the committee who perfected the programme and of fended the faculty. In order to swell our numbers we invited several from the junior class, and then levied a tax on all to defray expenses. At the prize exhibition in the church we distributed notices of what was in contemplation later in the evening, but it was full half-past eleven o'clock before we had our torch-light procession formed into line. By the time we had reached the stage which had sprung up since dark in front of the old college buildings, every house in the village had poured its occupants into the street. Not less than eight hundred, more probably one thousand, people stood in the dew and damp to witness the pageant.

"The funeral car was drawn by six white horses, and upon a piece of white marble in the centre lay the remains of the departed. The chief mourners were 'Prof. Tat' in effigy (Prof. Tat was the way our faithful mathematical professor was dubbed), and the widow of Euclid with a wailing babe in her arms. The

last-named individual was a dumpy little body, with a round face hidden under a large Navarino bonnet trimmed with geese feathers and crape. The other mourners were grotesquely attired, each carrying out some extravagant caprice of his own, and the effect was greatly heightened by the brilliant light of the torches.

"We had halted, and were about to ascend the platform, when the discovery was noted that, through haste in its construction, we had forgotten the steps! A good-natured freshman, seeing our embarrassment, doubled himself for the benefit of the crowd, and over him the principal actors crawled, tumbled, and rolled up, amid roars of laughter from one end of the village to the other, the amused spectators supposing it a part of the anticipated performance.

"Six of the best singers among us constituted our choir, and were dressed in long white farmers' frocks. They wore hideous false-faces which had movable jaws, and when they appeared on the stage they threw them wide open, and waited the order to sing. The volley of music which poured forth at last occasioned great applause, and then followed an oration from the brain and lips of yours truly, which nearly cost him his voice, after which came another song, excelling the first in volume, and finally a poem, full of good points and witty hits, a mock eulogy on the virtues of the deceased. It closed thus:

'We'll bury him in the earth so deep,  
Prof. Tet never more can find him;'

at which the sophomores groaned.

"When all was ready, we started for the grave, and the assemblage followed.

Up hill and down grade, by farm-house and through glen, for one, two, three, ay, four miles, this weird procession moved in solemn state. Then came the welcome order 'to the right,' and into green pastures we turned, and by still waters we tarried, until the last rites had been performed. A funeral pile was kindled after the manner of the *heathen Chinese*, and the widow advanced with the apparent intention of perishing with her lamented, but after going through a variety of gyrations she tossed her baby into the devouring elements, turned immediately and selected a cavalier, took his arm and headed the march homeward.

"The Gods usually sell their wares at a fair price, but that night's fun cost me dear. I got to my room just as day dawned in the east, damp, cold, and weary. I paused before my little, one-sided looking-glass (an heirloom in the family), and was shocked at the one-sided picture of blood-shot eyes and haggard features which I presented. To tell you the truth, Helen, I never took any special pride in my red hair, but on that morning it seemed to strike me as especially and altogether unbecoming, and finally settled upon my imagination as a positive calamity. I dwell upon these facts, trivial as they may seem, because from them, and the consequent loss of self-respect, I date many of the untoward events which have since rendered my life desolate. I found before the day was far advanced that I had taken a severe cold in my head, and that my throat was wretchedly sore.

"I hung about the church during the exercises, which I remember only as having been hot and long. In the evening I

was a favored guest at a private banquet, where we ate roast lamb and other delicacies of the season in a subterranean apartment. I was obliged to take an inventory of my pocket-handkerchiefs before dressing for the occasion, and, as they numbered only nine, I applied to my ohum for the loan of three more, in order to make myself presentable. At two o'clock in the morning I returned to my room to dump my traps into a trunk and get ready to leave Williamstown in the stage at seven.

"Did you ever take a ride over the Berkshire Hills? If so, I need not add here that it has no direct tendency toward soothing irritable nerves, particularly if you occupy the back seat in a crowded stage. I was not in a state of mind or body to be envied when I commenced the descent of Savoy Mountain, for the five long, dusty miles of continuous climbing since we left the Adams valley, with its innumerable sharp, short, jerking, jolting downs, had failed to improve my temporal condition. My eyes took no delight in the wild, romantic scenery of this region, about which Old-World travellers might well afford to rave; hills swelling above each other, and undulations shapely and uncouth, smooth and rugged, graceful and fantastic, thrown negligently side by side, bounding the view in every direction. I simply sat bolt upright like any other schoolboy, clinching my umbrella firmly with one hand, and using my pocket-handkerchief with the other, meanwhile staring at the two martyred-looking four-legged animals before us, which according to the driver were 'hosses,' as they rushed on furiously without regard to rough and

stony places, seeming only to desire to keep out of the way of the ponderous vehicle in their rear.

"All at once I was conscious of an awkward, bewildering sense of being about to stand on my head, and a crash!

"The next I knew of myself I was trying to disengage my foot from somebody's limp bonnet. The whole establishment was literally in a heap by the wayside, one of the fore-wheels having divorced itself without the aid of Western lawyers, and started off sidewise on its own account.

"*The team* had come to a stand-still, without showing the slightest sign of embarrassment or surprise. Indeed, I suppose they had lived in this wicked world so long that they were prepared for any mishap. They stood calmly nibbling the few stunted blades of grass within range of their noses on the overhanging bank. The driver, a good-natured, long-haired, middle-aged man, was looking after the killed and wounded. He found several cases of torn clothes, and one or two serious cares. I came forth from the wreck with an ugly bump on the side of my head.

"Upon examination it was found quite impossible to patch up the stage, even for temporary convenience, and we were obliged to walk to the nearest farmhouse and wait for the master of ceremonies to institute researches in regard to the whereabouts of some one who had vehicles to lend. It was a two-story cottage of the ancient New England cut and finish which we reached at length, and entered through a grassy enclosure and a wide-open door. A motherly-looking

matron came forward and gave us kindly greeting. She rolled up the paper curtains in her best room—they had large flowers in the centre—and pushed up the windows. There was a table, with Baxter's 'Saints' Rest' and 'The Life of Mrs. Isabella Graham' upon it, with two large drawers in front, a quaint rocking-chair, covered with copperplate calico, and a high bed, ornamented with a patch-work bed-quilt and valance, in the room. Enough chairs speedily made their appearance for our accommodation, and the good woman listened with undisguised interest to the account of our unlucky catastrophe, and then bathed my wound with arnica, and gave me some sneezing-snuff for my cold.

"I saw a pretty, rosy-cheeked girl in the next room braiding hats out of palm-leaf split very fine, and, like college boys in general, I was taken with thirst immediately. I went out and asked her for a drink of water, but she served me in such a high-bred style that I had nothing to do but return to the parlor when I had drained the goblet. I dropped into the nearest chair, however, and through the half-open door watched her movements. She held a consultation with her mamma, after which she laid an immaculate table-cloth upon two tables put together, one being high and narrow and the other low and broad; plates and knives and forks followed; tumblers for the company and mugs for the family; a big pitcher of water; a plate of cabbage; another of potatoes; a small round dish full of turnips; a platter of corn-beef; a boiled Indian pudding; a custard pie; and the salt-cellar, and the vinegar cruet, and the pepper-box, and the molasses

cup, and the butter, just where it was most convenient to tuck them.

"The men folks meanwhile came in from their work, and washed their hands and faces at the sink, at the far end of the kitchen, and wiped them on a rolling towel. Then they all pulled out their pocket-combs and straightened out their locks. When they were ready, we were invited to the table. They stood back until we were all seated, and then squeezed themselves in where they could get a chance. It was a well-cooked and palatable dinner, and the hungry stage passengers did it ample justice. While we were eating, the pretty Mary Ann stood at the back of our chairs, and kept the flies from the table with branches of asparagus, and the family cat jumped into each of our laps to ascertain for herself, no doubt, whether we had all the prerequisites for her intimate friendship.

"We could hear the rolling of distant thunder as we climbed into the red-and-blue farmer's wagon, all innocent of springs, which the driver had secured with which to finish our journey. As the rising cloud in the west obscured the sun's rays, I looked for my umbrella. Alas, it had been spilled in the general spill, and no one had had the forethought to gather it up! The lowering blackness grew nearer and still more near. The thunders bellowed in our very ears. The storm was upon us. No soft, warm, refreshing, namby-pamby drizzle, but a great splashing, dashing, deluging Massachusetts pour! Bonnets and hats wilted like young tomato plants in the hot sun! We were—in a much shorter space of time than it takes to tell it—soaked from the crowns of our heads to the soles of our



feet. Simultaneously with the wetting came a violent pelting with hailstones. A barn, with its two great doors open, caught the driver's eye. It was a little off the road, but the horses' heads were turned toward it; a tip one way, a tip the other, a twist, the striking of the fore-wheels against the wagon body, rapid jolting over a few loose planks, and a sudden elevation, brought us under its friendly shelter, where we sat dripping and waiting and thinking, and thinking and dripping and waiting, for a full round miserable hour.

"As the storm abated, we were backed skilfully out of our place of refuge, and the horses put into a run to make up for time lost. At sunset I was set down at Rockland Place, and most affectionately welcomed by my father and mother, although in my disfigured condition I must have been any thing but an object of parental pride.

"I may as well stop here to tell you that from my earliest recollections I had understood that I was destined for the ministry. My own predilections had not been taken into account any more than the fact that, as a schoolboy, I had floundered about seven-eighths of the time in a slough of unintelligible learning. 'It run in the family,' my grandmother used to say. Her grandfather and father were both ministers, and she married a minister. My honored sire had veered from the clerical groove, and settled down early in life as a tiller of the soil; but I, of the later generation, was doomed to walk in the footsteps of my ancestors.

"Rockland Place, our old homestead, has been described to you in a former letter —"

"We must look that up; I would like to hear about it," interrupted Spicy.

"— hence I will not recapitulate its charms just now. I am sure that my mother's sofa-rocker never fitted all the angles in my body so satisfactorily on any other occasion. Her cosy, cheerful sitting-room, with the books on the table, the flowers on the mantel, and the kitten on the rug, never seemed half so cheerful and comfortable as then. I fell into a state of agreeable content. The very air was redolent with repose and rested me.

"Supper was served on an old-fashioned round ebony table at my elbow. A cup of fine oolong tea, smoking waffles, delicious bread and butter, and strawberries and cream—real cow's cream, as brother Fred would say. My sister Phebe was at Mount Holyoke Seminary, and it never occurred to me to inquire after her until the evening was far spent.

"*'She is to be at home to-morrow,'* said my mother. *'A young miss from the school is coming with her to spend the vacation.'*

"*'May she be hanged first,'* was my impulsive rejoinder.

"My father and mother both looked up in astonishment!

"*'How is that?'* asked the former; *'it is the first time I ever heard you object to visitors!'*

"*'I don't object to them as a rule,'* I replied, slightly ashamed of myself for expressing my mind so hastily. *'But I am not in a mood just now for making myself agreeable. I can't speak, as you see, without sneezing, and even then I must speak through my nose, which gives my voice an intolerable twang. Strangers*

are an abomination under such circumstances, and school-girls, if possible, a degree worse. And South Hadley girls above all others. Tall, prim, school-marmish paragons of perfection, got up with special reference to missionaries and country ministers with small means.'

"Take it easy, my son. This little girl who is coming is no husband hunter, and I don't believe she would lay violent hands upon you if she were,' said my father, in his serio-comic style.

"I was angry with the good man for laughing at me, and I was angry with myself for being angry. I was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and my mother hurried me off to bed and nursed me with the most loving attention. But, in spite of hot ginger tea and mustard drafts, I passed a feverish, restless night, and, when the sun in the discharge of his public duty arose next morning, I was painfully conscious of dull, heavy aches all over my body.

"I dressed myself, for I could breathe better sitting up, and joined the family at the breakfast-table. I had no appetite, however, I was only ornamental there. After prayers I went out on the veranda. The storm had cleared away and the air was fresh and bracing. Prince, my favorite pony, was feeding on the lawn. I asked my father if he didn't think it would be a brilliant idea for me to saddle him and take a ride. He smiled, and said that it so seemed to him, if I was willing to make the ride a matter of convenience. He wanted to send for the mail, and my mother wanted a bag of flour from the mill.

"I bathed my face plentifully with water—it is one of my remedies for a cold

in the head—and then mounted my steed and cantered away. It was a glorious morning. Bryant must have had such a one in his mind when he spoke of the pure air up in this part of the world as a 'spiritual thing.' By the way, his birth-place is just over the hill by the meeting-house road. I could see the roof and trim chimneys from among the poplars which had cast their shadows over them for scores of years. How his boyhood must have been dotted through and through with similar bright days, more particularly grateful just after the earth had been washed by a shower like that of yesterday!

"The post-office was in a small store, where groceries, hardware, confectionery, and millinery dwelt in harmony together. The store-keeper was also the post-master and the town-clerk. He lived in the other end of the building, and his wife tended shop while he ate his meals. They were a well-assorted pair, patient in the pursuit of knowledge and invaluable to the society in which they moved. Mr. Foote spent most of his time in the store door, his help-meet in the pantry-window of the basement. He was of medium stature, slightly bent, and fifty. His large, greenish eyes took me in that morning and well-nigh swallowed me.

"Hav'n't you been riding that nag ruther fast for a warm mornin'? Home from college, eh? I don't see as you look as if you know any more than you did when you went up there. Goin' to help the old man about his hayin', or have you got too stuck up for that? Reckon you've spread it pretty hard,' was the salutation with which I was greeted.

"I asked for letters, and Prince lifted up one of his fore-feet, ostensibly to kick off the flies, and put it down again.

"There's only one here for your folks, and it's got a name on it that I suppose belongs to the school-gal Phebe is goin' to bring along with her. I don't know where it's from, but it's post-marked Buffalo. Guess it's a love-letter. If your folks are gittin her up here to make a match for you, they'll have to work lively."

"Thank you, I suppose they will. Can I have the letter?"

"The man shifted his position and sat down on a keg of molasses. Then he called out:

"Esther, fetch me that letter we were a talkin' about. The young parson wants it.' Then to me, 'How much better off do you take it you be than my boy who is milkin' cows and diggin' potatoes for a living?'

"I really don't know, sir. I hope he is quite well,' I replied.

"Just then the document was brought to me, and after reading the address, 'Miss Ida Everett,' in a bold, dashing hand, I put it in my side-pocket, and turned my face millward. I had scarcely proceeded half a dozen rods when I heard my name called, and looking up saw Mrs. Cook standing in the front door of her little cottage. I reined Prince up so close to the great flat stone which formed her door-step, that I nearly broke down her spotted lily bush.

"Well, this is a surprise now! Be's you home from college, Gideon?"

"I answered in the affirmative, as that was a point necessary to be established before proceeding with the interview.

"Pretty well, are you?"

"Not very, I have a severe cold in my head; and I sneezed immediately to establish my veracity beyond question.

"You don't say! Wall, now, I never! You've been kinder careless over there to Williamstown, hav'n't you? you'd better take some thoroughwort tea right away, to keep it from settlin on your chist."

"I wish it would settle on my *chist*, anywhere but in my head,' I responded, irreverently.

"That's wicked, Gideon; it might throw you into a consumptive. How do you like college? Awful strict over there, aint they?"

"Very."

"Do tall! Phebe's comin' home pretty soon, I hear?"

"To-day."

"Now, you don't tell me! They were a sayin' over to the post-office that there was a school-gal comin' along with her to stay a spell. I don't know what her name is! You'll be a sparkin' her up, I s'pose?"

"Not I. I'm coming home one of these days to marry Ruth Damon. Don't you think I had better?"

"Ruth Damon! Why, you must be crazy! She's older than our Mary! She's never had a beau since that fellar came up from Northampton in his antic horse and team and took her ridin'—and that was much as twenty year ago. You marry Ruth Damon! Well, all I have to say is, if you do, you'll make two shiftless couples!"

"I thought you used to say I bade fair to make a good husband."

"I don't mean nothin' to the contra

of that now. But you and Ruth Damon could not get along together, I knows. Why, lands alive! she can't iron a shirt decent, and that's no character for a minister's wife. A poor stick you'd be a takin' care of an unpractical woman! You've been brung up too tender like. I always said so. You hain't got no better hands than a woman. I don't mean to say anythin' agin your mother, for she is master good if she is smart feelin'. We've got all over that grudge of ourn about her ketchin your father when he was as good as engaged to darter Mary. She didn't mean no harm, I s'pose.'

"See, how was that, Mrs. Cook?" I asked, although I had heard the story a score of times.

"Why, you see, your father was our minister's son! I held him in my arms when he was a baby, and seen him grow up around us. Why, we were almost as near kin as relations, because Captain Cook rung the bell for meetin' all those years that your grandfather Gildersleeme preached the gospel to us. Wall, as I was a sayin', when your father got to be tall and handsome like you here afore me, and went round a courtin' the gals, he was thought somethin' of a ketch, and we reckoned a good deal on gettin' him into our family. He used to come a knockin' here Sunday nights and pretended it was to get the key of the church, but the Captain and I knew a thing or two, if he was so sly. Bime-by up come a school-gal with Fidelia Raymond, and every thing was all nip and pucker, and that was the end of poor Mary. She's been so heart-broke she's never encouraged nobody's affections since. I'm

afeard you are agoin' to be took in just as your father was.'

"And then what will become of poor Ruth?" I replied, with mock gravity, as I lifted my hat and rode away.

"Dear Mrs. Cook! I shall always remember her. She was one of that class of women of whom a sample may be found in almost every New England village, whose business it is to find out everybody else's business, and who attend to their own business by minding everybody else's business. What she lacked in knowledge she made up in native inquisitiveness. She had a fashion of stopping passers-by, particularly young people and children, to ask questions and recite the latest news. It had been my favorite amusement to be thus arrested ever since I could remember. If she was not on the lookout, I usually coughed to attract her attention. Her quaint and original use of the English language was my especial delight. She had none of the cunning and sly malice of her neighbors, the postmaster and his wife, but garnered up every grain of information obtainable, added it to her stock in trade, turned it over and over, enlarged upon it, and scattered it broadcast through the town. She was to such a community what a daily newspaper is to a city, and about as reliable. Captain Cook (not the one who was killed at the Sandwich Islands) hoed his onions and cabbages in the little garden south of the house, and did duty for over half a century at the bell-rope in the vestibule of the white church, which had such an aristocratic way of standing on the side-hill by itself, and looking down upon its long rows of horse-sheds.

"My errand at the mill was quickly accomplished. As I came out upon the steps Prince sidled off, and the mill-boy ran to bring him back. Waiting there, I looked up at the eighty maple trees on the bank, between the road and the fence. How singular that they should be in pairs! From my point of observation they had the appearance of a boarding-school procession just ready for their morning march. They winked and blinked at me, and seemed to say:

'We know a story of long ago,  
Which has rendered this spot famous.'

What, the old 'Mountain Miller' book! Who cares for that, or the spring where the good man used to drink, either! It was welling up though, cool and clear, from under the soft green shade, and I was thirsty. It would put that band of school-girls out of my head, perhaps, to take a drink. I stepped along nimbly to where I could rest my knee on a neatly contrived little bridge, a few inches in width, and, with the tip of my nose in the water, succeeded in obtaining the coveted draught. Upon the trunk of the tree nearest the spring were carved innumerable names. How charming to leave one's autograph to posterity, I thought to myself as I pulled out my pocket-knife and rudely cut my own.

"Prince had not been altogether pleased with the plan of carrying a bag on his back, and it took some time for us to convince him that it would not interfere with his future respectability, or prevent his moving in the best society, if he behaved himself. In the end I was conveyed home with exceeding celerity.

"I found my mother busy in the kitchen. I lounged in the parlor awhile,

trying to read. My eyes rebelled, and then I sat down at the piano and produced from it a few discordant notes. Finally, I took a turn through the garden, picked some syringas and bachelor-buttons and tried to construct a nosegay, but failed.

"Upon the other side of the street was a blank wall, below which was a steep grassy declivity, terminating in the bed of a babbling brook. Some years before I had chosen this site for the erection of a sort of study-house for myself. It was founded upon two rocks, one upon either side of the stream, and remained a mournful specimen of my boyish attempt at architecture. Going down to it for the want of something better to do, I found its outer wall desecrated by a huge placard—**TAKEN**. Dolefully as I felt, I could not help smiling, knowing that it was one of my father's innumerable pleasantries. I went in, and, seeing the old rickety settee in its accustomed place, I threw myself upon it in a half-sitting posture, with my head and feet well supported, and fell into a reverie, which ended in a nap, and the nap ended in the following manner:

"'No. I will never marry a widower, nor a minister, nor a man with red hair. What a queer old shell this is!'

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE VISION OF BEAUTY.

"THE speaker at that instant appeared before the entrance to my retreat, and paused, looking curiously into my face. It was a vision that came upon me like the glimpse of some better world, and

caused me to forget that I was made of clay. It was a slight, graceful girl, in fresh white muslin, with blue ribbons floating from hair, neck, and waist; ribbons that must have been selected to match her eyes, which were of a heavenly shade, more beautiful than any I had ever seen, and about her half-parted mouth a great many little lights hovered. Dear Helen, was not that enough to bewilder the senses of a susceptible youth just waking out of slumber?

"And now listen to what followed! Phebe discovered me in the same breath.

"'Oh, Grandison! Mother said you were up-stairs asleep, and has kept us running round the house on tip-toe ever since we arrived. She says you are half sick. I should think as much! You *are* a pretty-looking youth! I should say you had been on a spree for a fortnight,' and then she walked in and kissed me in her old sisterly way, as if that could make amends for the suspicion she had cast upon my morals!

"I was furious, but hadn't vim enough to show it, and before I could have spoken, if I had made the effort, Phebe went on:

"'My brother, Miss Everett, a miscreant who has seen better days.'

"And that was our introduction.

"I bowed stiffly as I rose from my ungainly position. My feet were so numb that I could not plant them firmly and thereby give myself a manly air. I could do nothing, in fact, but look very awkward and embarrassed, and, like the famous parrot, think a great deal without speaking a word.

"'Pardon my intrusion; it was

wholly unintentional I assure you,' said Miss Everett, retreating.

"'Yes, we came down here to read our love-letters and give the *dominie* season for repose, and have all unwittingly run into the lion's very den,' chimed in Phebe. 'But we will leave you to commence your dream just where it was broken off. Adieu.'

"And they were gone.

"I watched them through a big crack in my hermitage, as they wandered arm-in-arm along the vale, and finally ascended the bank and disappeared. An hour later the bell rang for dinner. As I came in sight of the house two pink-and-white clouds, with blue streamers, flitted through the doorway. The table was adorned with prettily-arranged bouquets of pinks, mignonettes, sweet peas, and roses. The visitor was placed at my father's right hand, and Phebe at his left. I sat under my mother's wing.

"Our house had a southerly front, and an unobstructed prospect of two or more miles of country scenery. There was a broad green meadow in the foreground, a grove of hackmatack trees—where we sometimes held picnics—just beyond, a saw-mill and two or three houses near the base of a hill in the distance, two brown cottages, about half way up, my grandmother's white domicile on the summit, and, a little farther on, the pretentious dwelling of Mr. Pinkerton, the greatest horse-jockey in the country. The fields in every direction resembled an irregularly-pieced patchwork bed-quilt, such a one as might have been produced in a sewing society.

"My mother left the door ajar to give Miss Everett a glimpse of this pretty

view, for she always argued that if people had fine tastes they ought to be indulged in them. The draft coming upon my back, through the same open door, made me sneeze. With my handkerchief doing duty, I pressed my fingers firmly upon my upper lip to prevent any further explosion. Alas! vain were my efforts. I sneezed again, got purple in the face, coughed, sneezed, cried, sneezed, choked, sneezed, and left the table without asking to be excused.

"My mother followed me to my room, bringing my dinner with her; but I had no appetite. She stroked my forehead lovingly, and laid a wet cloth across my eyes, then went down again. Phebe came up when dinner was over, and sat a half an hour with me. She chatted about the seminary, Lily White, Miss Jessop, the ride from Northampton, etc.

"It's awful provoking in you, Grandison, to go and catch such a cold just at this time. Your eyes look as if they had been soaked over-night in skim-milk, your face is swollen like a porpoise, and, in short, you haven't a good look left. Only to think! I've been boasting about your beauty and your fine manners for a year, and then brought my room-mate home with me, expecting her to be love-struck at sight, and you have gone and got up such a ridiculous first impression.'

"'Good heavens! quit your nonsense!' was my emphatic exclamation.

"Night came, and so did the doctor, for my father had great faith in the doctrine that 'a stitch in time saves nine.' After going through the usual ceremonies of pulse-feeling and interrogations, the man of the saddle-bags gave his

opinion and a prescription. My father gave him a dollar for each. But there was no evading the fever with which I was threatened. It was already creeping through every vein in my body. I did not stand upon my feet again for weeks. Verily I was at death's door, although at the time happily unconscious of my situation. My mother's gentle hands bathed my scorched forehead and cooled my parched lips. Not always. There were other hands that ministered to my necessities, and there was magnetism in their touch. I missed them when at intervals they smoothed not my pillow. I dreamed of blue eyes, fancied the skies were full of them, all beyond my reach, and I starving to death for the want of a pair. Then I was transported to a land where angels dwelt. I was carried there in a broken-down stage, with only three wheels, and people on the way laughed at my distress when I asked for a cushion for my head. All the angels wore white muslin, and the air was perfumed with new-mown hay. I was happy for awhile, particularly when my face was whisked with ribbons and my neck scratched with finger-rings. During one of my ecstatic moments I was precipitated into my little room in the college-buildings at Williamstown, and there found my bureau crammed with letters addressed to 'Miss Ida Everett,' and each letter contained a pair of ear-rings tipped with blue. There was no end to my vagaries. Sometimes I was riding Prince over a mountain of bouquets. At others trying to climb high places in pursuit of fairies. Then I took a prejudice to colors, refused to take medicine that was white, or green, or



red, or brown, or black, and my attendants were perplexed to know what to do with me. I did not look at it; I only asked what the color was. Finally, a sweet voice told me it was blue! After that I was satisfied.

"It was on a bright August afternoon that I opened my eyes, with my reason once more enthroned. My room was a picture of neatness and comfort. My eyes wandered from one familiar object to another, and fell at last upon a tiny glove on the foot of the bed. My mother was sitting by me and spoke my name softly.

"Yes, mother. I have been very sick, have I?"

"Her tears rained, and she kissed me tenderly.

"But you are restored to us again. Keep quiet now, and we will talk it over hereafter."

"My recovery from that hour was rapid. Yet, for many days, I saw no one save my mother and the physician. The house was still as the Sabbath, and I was haunted by a strange fear that my goddess had departed. One day I ventured to ask for Phebe. I had avoided her name hitherto, for a singular dread took possession of my soul at every approach to the subject, which was inexplicable.

"She is sick, dear."

"Very?"

"There are no alarming symptoms at present."

"Is it the fever?"

"Yes; but of a very mild type."

"Who takes care of her? You are always with me."

"Ida Everett. She is a most excel-

lent nurse for one so young, and what renders it all the more pleasant, she is devotedly attached to Phebe."

"Dear foolishness of mankind! How I was thrilled by the mention of that name! It was my private, very private opinion that the desire to hear it and know that its proprietor was still a dweller under our roof, had been preying upon my mind for a much longer period than I was even aware of myself. It was like some far-off pain suddenly bereft of its sting. I closed my eyes and remained silent for a time. My mother must have thought me asleep, for she quitted the room noiselessly. How long afterward I have no idea, but I was conscious of a presence, although I heard no sound. I raised my eyelids languidly, and all my faculties were at once plunged into a torpor of admiration! The young, bright creature, who had so moved my soul to its very depths, was standing before the mantel pouring something from a small phial into a tumbler. She wore a pretty French calico, made after the fashion of the period, and which seemed to endow her with a dignity, a softness, and a grace that all the panoply of feathers, silks, and flowers had failed to enrich any other lady of my acquaintance with. I could see her face reflected in the mirror upon the bureau, but she never once glanced toward me. I was as one dead, my breath held by an irresistible fascination, until, with the medicine in her hand, she had gone as quietly as she came.

"Then a profound calm descended upon me. The poetry of a whole life seemed to centre in one being. I knew she had been there before. The dream had not been all a dream. She had

helped to take care of me during the dark season when I was balancing between life and death. She had been witness to all my sick follies. Ah! what had she thought of me! Would she ever come to my room again?

"I asked this last question of myself over and over again during the long days of convalescence. But I opened not my lips to any living mortal. Of Phebe I heard encouraging accounts. The disease had touched her lightly, and the prospects were favorable toward her getting down stairs before me. I grew grave and melancholy. The doctor recommended change of air and scene as soon as I should have gained strength sufficient for a journey.

"One morning my mother did not come to me as usual; Mrs. Manning, a bungling, good-hearted neighbor, brought me my breakfast of toast and tea. I asked for an explanation, and was told that

"Mrs. Gildersleeve was busy just now."

"I was restless and wretched, I knew not why. The atmosphere oppressed me, and I complained of cold hands. Mrs. Manning bustled about, doing nothing generally, and at last discovered that my feet were cold too. It had been a cool night, and from the south window a strong breeze fanned me. The doctor had been specific about it. I must not run any risk of getting chills. He had repeated the caution many times, for I was weak still. I asked for a shawl or blanket to be thrown across the bed, but, instead, the monster appeared with two bottles of hot water, which she insisted upon placing at my feet. I remonstrated

as vigorously as the circumstances would permit, but she said, 'Well folks knew best about such things.'

"Perhaps they do, as a rule, but they don't always put their corks into their bottles tight enough, as I found to my sorrow, for in a few minutes the smoking contents were spread through the length and breadth of my bed.

"I raved. No school-boy ever called for his mother with more vehemence than I did for mine. I literally yelled. My persecutress tried to silence me, begged me to tell her what was the matter, offered to do any thing in the world for me, only not frighten the family; but, after using a good many adjectives not to be found in the catechism, I assured her that, unless my wishes were instantly gratified, I should arise and go to my mother myself. Then she disappeared.

"In the course of three or four minutes the door was pushed open, and Ida Everett stepped lightly into the room, came straight to my bedside, and taking one of my hands in both of hers said:

"I am so sorry for you, but you really cannot see your mother to-day. Is there any thing we can do to comfort you?"

"Why! What has happened to my mother?"

"A mortal terror seized me. My brain seemed to have taken fire. I was permeated as it were with an intuitive apprehension of dire calamity, and my eyes almost started from their sockets.

"She is not well, and I am requested to ask you to remain as quiet and as patient as possible. Mrs. Manning has volunteered to stay with you, and will do all she can."

"No doubt of it, even to the filling of my bed with hot water. What ails mother?"

"She hesitated a second. There was truth in her sweet blue eyes, and she could not carry out the deception they had deemed prudent to impose upon me.

"I must know all. Is she dead?" The words oozed from my lips like blood from a poniard wound.

"She is."

"My senses seemed suddenly to desert me. I neither dreamed nor suffered. I had fainted away. When I again opened my eyes my room was almost dark, and my father was supporting my head in his arms. Some one administered a tonic to my lips, and I recognized the tiny, tapering fingers that guided the spoon. Then my memory returned, and I summoned all the forces of my will to speak. It was some time, however, before I could articulate a syllable.

"Forgive me; I ought never to have come into this room, for I might have known that I should have betrayed all at the very first questionings, and the shock has almost killed you," came from a low, choked voice near by.

"I struggled a moment for strength, then I caught the little hand which was now fanning me gently, and covered it with kisses. She drew it away, not hastily, and caressed my burning forehead, while my father sobbed like a woman.

"Tell me all about it," I stammered at last.

"She had been stricken with paralysis, and never breathed afterward, my precious, loving, darling lady mother; and as I looked into my father's face I

felt that I should soon lose him also, for grief had crushed him. He had grown old, altered, frightful. His stiffened lips essayed to speak, but ended only in a groan. His eyes, which I had known as sending forth only flashes of humor and pride and love, were glassy and dim. His lips were pallid, and premature wrinkles had settled across his handsome forehead.

"I don't know how the story was telegraphed to my brain, or whose eloquence taught me to forget myself in pity for the strong, suffering man at my side. I wept bitter tears, but they were for his great, hopeless sorrow, and not for my own. All at once he looked down at me long and earnestly. Then he stooped and kissed me once, twice, thrice. The little act was in itself a volume, for I had never received such a caress from him since I had arrived at man's stature.

"You are very like her," he said.

"Good God, how his face lighted up! How splendid, how tender, were his eyes for that one moment! How much fascination in his warm, true soul, refined and elevated by such a companionship as had been his blessing thus far on the journey of life! How sweet and fiery with passion was his voice, and his submission! Did he deceive himself when he bowed his head and said solemnly:

"O Lord, our beloved Heavenly Father, thy will be done."

"Exhausted, I fell into a quiet slumber, from which I passed into a half-dozing, ecstatic state, more alarming than my previous delirium. My father's youngest sister, Aunt Sally, came and as-

sumed command of our stricken household, and devoted herself principally to me. The funeral was conducted so quietly that not a sound reached my ears, and only muffled footsteps and soft whispers rippled the air of my apartment for days afterward. Once more I almost bridged the chasm into the better world beyond the skies——”

“A whole sheet missing!” I had paused and been searching for it for some moments.

“What a shame! you must have misplaced it,” said Spicy.

“No.” And I made a careful examination. “It is positively not here.”

“How annoying! I want to know what happened next. If it wasn’t just about *ghost-time* I would go *spooking* back into that queer closet and see if I could find it.”

“You’ve quieted your conscience, then, in regard to the right and wrong of the thing——”

“No, indeed I have not. I am convinced, as I told you before, that we shall both be sorry some day for what we have done. But my curiosity is up, and that is my strongest point, you know. Besides, from the very first moment that I laid my eyes on them, it has just seemed as if those old letters had something to do with me. You needn’t laugh. I feel as solemn as Deacon Parson’s widow about it; and the notion sticks to me too.”

There was a knock at the door. It was Maggie. She had come to say that Miss Spicy’s room was ready. We both started up and went at once to see it. It was on the opposite side of the hall from

where we were, and over the library. It had an arched ceiling, which was tinted somewhat gorgeously, a continuation of the bay window with a reef taken at each side, and several small niches in the walls. The carpet was down and the bed was made; and Spicy’s trunks had been brought up.

“It looks as if I had always lived here,” said Spicy. “I wonder that *person* didn’t unpack for me, she seems to have done every thing else! Meddie, I am growing courageous—let’s go and hunt for that lost leaf.”

“Oh, no, not to-night. There is no gas in the closet, and I shouldn’t like to take a candle in there, even if I had one, which I dare say I have not.”

“I know! you are afraid!”

“Nonsense! you know better. I am entirely too practical.”

“Meddie, do you remember that burlesque concert we once attended in Maumee City, Ohio?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Don’t you know how every man out of twelve declared he wasn’t afraid of ghosts?”

“Well, what of it?”

“Sure enough, what of it? Why, when the ghost really came, the whole kit-and-dig of them lost their wits and scampered in every direction.”

“You talk as if there was a ghost coming here. I have no doubt I should quake if I stood face to face with one. But what is the use in wasting our breath on the subject when there is not such a thing as a ghost in existence!”

“May be not,” pronounced with a dubious inflection. “So we shall have to wait till morning to find out how the

minister made love! Oh, dear me! then I'll go to bed. Of course the lovely being took care of him, and consoled him, and he said all the sweet things in the English language to her, and there was an engagement, and a diamond ring, and a wedding — ”

“You forget that he was courting another lady, the one to whom this confession was made,” I interrupted her to say. Spicy had dropped into a little cane rocker, and was pulling off one of her boots. She looked up, with a half-comical expression, resting upon her pretty face :

“Then Ida Everett must have jilted him.”

I was standing with my back toward the door, which was wide open, and from the glass opposite I caught a glimpse of Nursy Brown, with baby in her arms, flitting from it, or perhaps by it; and, supposing she had come to speak to me about some household matter, I stepped out into the hall and saw her going into the blue room, to which I followed her.

“I have prepared the front chamber for you,” she said, “thinking this would be a more quiet place to leave little Bright while we are pounding and prowling about and nailing down carpets. I dare say you are tired enough to sleep anywhere, but he might wake and cry.”

“Very true.”

I stepped to the bed and opened it for her, and, after the little lump was deposited, I tucked him in and dropped a few kisses on his neck and arms.

“It is at the end of the hall,” said Nursy Brown, as, with my hat in my hand and my shawl thrown across my arm, I started for my new quarters.

It was the largest room on the second floor, and all my best bedroom furniture was there. It seemed so natural to have every thing in its proper place that I took it as a matter of course, and congratulated myself upon my orderly brain. That is, I knew very well that I had had no hand in settling things so speedily, but it was certainly creditable to me indirectly for keeping such efficient help.

I was soon sleeping soundly, and the night was wearing away. Having no care over the proceedings below stairs, I heard none of the noise and commotion. Nursy Brown had hired two or three extra hands on her own responsibility, and was pushing things into their places with a spirit and determination which were commendable, to say the least. It was four o'clock, as I afterward learned, when she went up-stairs to lie down. Myra and Maggie thought it would not pay for them “to go and undress just for two hours,” so sat down in the kitchen and laid their heads on the table. They said they had not been asleep, although I took their assertions for what they seemed worth, when they heard a piercing scream and a heavy fall nearly over their heads. They both ran up-stairs and found Nursy Brown lying upon the floor, apparently dead.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SINGULAR APPARITION.

I SPRANG to my feet at the first call, and, without stopping to throw even a shawl about me, ran to the blue room. If I had any definite ideas or fears it was that something had happened to my ba-

by. But he was sweetly sleeping on his pillow, happily unconscious of what was going on around him. It took me several seconds to recognize Nursy Brown as she lay stretched like a corpse before the bed. Her unbecoming cap and net had both been displaced when she fell, and a large quantity of rich brown hair had fallen from its close confinement. Her forehead, which I had never before seen, was classic, and all her features finely chiselled. Her hand, too, attracted my attention, it was so delicately small, and clinched fast within it was one of the letters with which we had been amusing ourselves during the evening, and which I had left scattered about in the room.

I knelt down by her and tried to raise her head with my hands. I blew in her face and screamed for the camphor bottle. Maggie, half-bewildered, tried to find it, and came running with a bottle of shoe-blackening. Myra arrived about the same time with a tumbler of cold water, and I dashed it into the pale face. She rallied, caught her breath, and languidly opened her eyes. In a moment after she spoke:

"Some one in there!" and her eyes directed mine toward the door of the wierd closet, which was slightly ajar.

"Who?"

"A woman! Oh, shut that door!" and she fainted quite away the second time.

I nearly drenched her with water, trying to restore her, and then with Myra's and Maggie's help lifted her upon the bed. Meanwhile somebody closed that closet door! There was no one in the room but Nursy, Myra, Maggie, and myself, and neither of us was within

four feet of it. There was no window open through which a draft could have been guilty of the act, and therefore I was led to believe that the place had an occupant. A sickening sensation came over me, and I could not see distinctly for a moment, although the gas was turned up so high that it roared. My next thought was of burglars, and I recovered my self-possession sufficiently to remember that they were cowards as well as assassins, and, while they might look hard at one woman alone, they would scarcely attack four. \*

"She was dressed in white," Nursy Brown said, as soon as she was able to speak again, "a sort of robe was thrown about her. She peered through the door a second time just as I began to tell you about it. I don't know why it should have affected me so, only that there was such a strange look in her eyes, and it all came so unexpectedly upon me."

"Maybe it is some of the old boarders coming back by mistake," said Myra.

"Why? did the folks keep boarders who lived here before us?" asked Maggie.

"Jest a few for company, so the old cook told me. She came for some aprons which she had left behind, while we were a movin' in yesterday. See! is it yesterday or to-day?"

"It's to-morrow! don't you see the shine in the east?" responded Maggie.

My nerves were fast recovering their usual tone, and I mentally resolved to make personal researches into the cause of the disturbance as the day advanced. Leaving Maggie and Myra in charge of Nursy Brown, I went to my room and dressed. My mind was full of

the strange occurrence, and I rejoiced that Spicy had not been wakened in the general excitement, as she was so timid and impressible, her faith in the supernatural would certainly have been established beyond question.

When I returned to the blue room Nursy Brown was sitting up, and her hair and cap were arranged as she usually wore them. It was light enough to see without the gas and the shutters were thrown open. Maggie had picked up the loose letters and laid them in a chair, and Myra had gone down stairs to kindle the kitchen fire.

I took a seat and questioned Nursy somewhat further about the apparition, but elicited no new facts. She seemed greatly distressed at having caused such a commotion, and seemed wholly mystified in regard to our singular visitor.

"Come, Maggie," I said, starting up and approaching the closet door, "let's see who's in there."

"Oh, no! no! I couldn't look in there! I should fall dead—indeed I should! Don't make me!" and she turned very white.

I had forgotten how proverbially superstitious Irish servants are, or I should not have asked her.

"Never mind, I can go alone." I had my hand already on the door.

"I'll follow you," said Nursy Brown, rising with much difficulty.

"By no means, you must keep quiet," I said, taking hold of her and compelling her to sit down again. "Nobody is going to hurt me at this hour of the day. If they should attempt it, Maggie can put her head out of the window and scream for help;" and I laughed, although I did

not see any thing especially funny to laugh at just then.

"Wait, wait, let me call Myra. She isn't so bad of fear as me," exclaimed Maggie, running out of the room and down-stairs.

I was not sorry for the delay. It gave me time to reinforce my bravery, which was sadly on the wane. Who knew but there were concealed demons in that out-of-the-way place! I had read of haunted houses, and trancespeaking, and automatic writing, and of the introduction of flowers and fruits into closed rooms, of voices in the air, and visions of the human body. I had always persistently laughed at the whole subject, but ridicule could not materially affect the actual state of things whatever they might be. No good thing, or great thing, in this world, was ever accepted or believed in at once. Christianity was not, the existence of a western continent was not, the use and power of electricity or steam were not; whatever was opposed to the experience of the vast majority of mankind was commonly rejected as incredible. But why argue? I was not going to harbor any hallucination. No, not I. My house must be redeemed from the shadow of a suspicion. I myself would march to the front or perish in the attempt.

Myra came up, but I could see that she had done it much against her will. Both of the servants looked anxious and careworn, and remained standing near the entrance to the blue room. I summoned my strength for a final struggle, gave the dreaded door a nervous push, it yielded, creaked a little and flew back to the very wall. There was nobody to

be seen, and there was no appearance of anybody's having been in the closet since Spicy and I left it the night before. After staring until my eyes ached, I wheeled about suddenly, and nearly over-turned my three companions, who, standing on tiptoe behind me, were looking over my shoulders.

"Perhaps some one has entered and passed out of that window!" suggested Nursy Brown.

I stepped down into the room and went and tried to open it. It was immovable. Indeed, as far as I could discover, there was no way of opening it. It was a little square sash with four panes of glass fitted into a plain pine casing. I was anxious to see what was below, and pressed my face in among the cobwebs to get a view. The slanting roof of the woodshed joined to the grape-arbor on the lower side stretched upward until within a foot of the window, so it would have been not only possible, but comparatively easy, for a person to have reached this point from the outside. But there was not the slightest evidence of its having been done. The ragged vines hung just where they did yesterday, and the rubbish in the room lay on the floor in the same corner where we had poked it over. One magazine, in particular, was open where I had looked at a picture, then dropped it for something else more interesting.

Nursy Brown had sat down on the steps, and her face was a positive study, although I was not sufficiently gifted to read it without a teacher.

Myra and Maggie looked at each other, looked into the empty room, looked at me, and breathed hard.

"What is all this rumpus about? Are you hunting for that letter so early?" asked Spicy, putting her head into the room, a head so ruffed and rumpled that it was quite apparent that she didn't take her hair off nights, as some ladies do.

"Bless your heart, there's been a ghost —"

"Hush!"

It was Myra who vouchsafed the information, and it was my peremptory order that interrupted her.

"A ghost!" Spicy clinched her hands convulsively and her teeth chattered.

"I told you so, Meddie!"

"You told me?" I replied contemptuously. "As for this ghost business, the least said about the better. I shall take measures to ferret out the secret, and until then I wish the subject dropped."

The last two sentences were intended for my servants' ears, although I was looking at my sister. They left the room soon after and went in silence to their work. Nursy Brown was very weak, and I helped her to the bed, where she laid down beside baby. Convincing myself that she needed nothing but rest and quiet, I threw my arm around Spicy, who was still in a violent nervous tremor, and led her back to her own room. She had learned so much already that I esteemed it the wisest course to give her a full history of the night's scare. Indeed, I could do very little less, she was so persistent in her inquiries. I sat upon the side of her bed, and she stood before the bureau putting up her hair, and taking it down again. Once or twice she laughed hysterically, but upon the whole sur-



prised me amazingly by the manner in which she listened to my recital.

"Only to think!" she went on to say, after I had finished, "what I was always most afraid of, I have come to at last! Just like Susie Wharton. Her besetting fear was of finding some one under her bed. All the while we roomed together at school she worried me to death ab outit, and, if she forgot to look under just the last thing before putting out the light, she would lie and quake and make me get up and do it for her. And sure as I live she found a man there one night! It was after she went home, and it must have been a great satisfaction after looking for him so long! How I laughed when I heard of it! Now I must write to her and tell her about my ghost. I knew it would come, and upon the whole I am ever so much relieved to think it is here."

"Spicy Merriman!"

"Yes, dear, that is my name."

"You are a perfect riddle! I never know what to make of you!"

"Is that so? then you had better let me see what I can make of myself. I am sure of one thing—I can't make my hair crimp this morning without entirely too much trouble. So up it goes plain. There! how does that look?"

"Very well."

"How do you know? you are not looking at it. Pray what are you thinking about? Is it the ghost still? I do wish I had seen it. Why didn't you call me?"

"The truth is, Spicy, if I had not seen that door closed myself without any visible agency, I should suspect the whole a trick of the imagination. Nursy

Brown was tired; she may have been asleep and waked suddenly; some jar on the street, or even on the railroad track, may have thrown the door open, and all the rest have been a distorted dream. The more I look upon it in that light, the more the theory gains foothold in my mind. Otherwise, some person must have been secreted in the house for no good purpose, and made his escape in a way not yet revealed to our perceptions."

"You are matter-of-fact enough to kill a saint, Meddie. It is ever so much nicer to call it a ghost, and tell our friends the house is haunted, and spirits of a highly-exceptional character are our daily visitors! and thus create an interesting sensation. Had I better put on my blue merino or my gray empress cloth?"

"Either. It don't matter. We sha'n't go out or see company to-day."

I began to feel sleepy, since there was no further occasion for energy and effort, and, pulling one of the pillows into position, fitted it to my head. When Maggie came to summon us to breakfast, an hour later, she found me in the apparent enjoyment of a comfortable morning nap, and Spicy would not allow her to wake me.

An unusually loud ring at the front door bell roused me about ten o'clock. Spicy and Bright were sitting in the middle of the floor, engrossed in the contents of my jewelry-box. The little fellow was ornamented from his head to his toes, and his incorrigible aunty was instructing him in the art of winding-up my watch.

"One of the moving-men says it was

a bad bill you gave him yesterday, and will you please change it?" said Maggie, after coming into the room guardedly, to see if I was awake.

"I did not give him a *two*!" I said, taking it into my fingers and trying to recall the exact circumstances when I paid the man. "No, it was a ten, and a five, a ten and two fives, now I have it, and he gave me back a two. I paid him for nine loads."

"What shall I tell him?" asked Maggie.

"That he is mistaken. He must have got it somewhere else."

A moment after I heard loud words in a man's voice, and Maggie's expostulating tones. The next I knew, the rascal stood before me.

"And is this the way you trate a poor working-man, to pay him in counterfeitts! I'll have the ra-ul stuff afore I lave the house, so be a forkin' it out."

I rose to my feet and undertook to explain; but I was afraid of the man, for he seemed to be under the influence of liquor, and finally I retained the bill and gave him two dollars in gold.

"And it was ontirely too chape we moved ye anyhow. Could ye be after giving me a little change for a glass of beer?" he went on as he wrapped the money up in a piece of dirty sheepskin.

I caught his glittering eyes fixed upon my baby and his surroundings, and I trembled. It was a trifling thing in itself, but I had occasion to remember it afterward.

"Shall I call William to show this man the way down stairs?" exclaimed Spicy, springing up and coming forward, with her face very much flushed.

"No, you needn't ever mind about it now, miss. If you want to be so mane as not to pay your honest debts, lit it go, lit it go, I'll give it to ye;" and he blundered back the way he came, and we heard Maggie lock the door after him.

"Well done, Spicy! What a brave girl am I! How about your William?" and I laughed.

"The old nuisance! I couldn't stand it any longer. How quick he budged when he thought we had a man among us! A house full of women are a helpless set anyhow, and if I were a robber or a thief, I should do just as they do, pounce upon every one I heard of. Say, Meddie! let's send for cousin Phil to come and sleep here, nights. I know he would just as soon, he never has to stay at the bank evenings. He might have that little room at the head of the front stairs."

"He could not have that room, for it is the best suited for Nursy Brown of any in the house, and I see she has all her things as well as baby's already in there. But if it is best to send for him, and I begin to think it is, I could put him in the blue room."

"Capital!" said Spicy, "And we won't tell him a thing about the ghost until he has tried it one night."

"What's the use in telling him at all?" I asked.

"Oh, there wouldn't be any fun in keeping it to ourselves all the while. May I write to him a note, or go for him?"

"Neither. I will send Maggie. I want you to stay with Bright, for I suppose Nursy Brown is laid by, and my head is aching fearfully. I have had too much excitement."

I declined breakfast, went to my room and shut myself in alone. I dozed a little, but I was in too much pain to get any sound sleep. Myra came up with some tea about noon and kindly urged me to drink it, which I did, and felt much better for it. She didn't leave immediately, but stood first on one foot and then on the other, and finally wound her hands up in her apron.

"I think I shall be goin' about the time my month is up," she at last stammered out.

"Why so?" I asked, quietly.

"Because my aunt is sick and wants me to come and stay with her a spell," she replied, looking at the carpet.

"Oh, very well, Myra."

It has been a principle of mine for many years to treat my servants well and pay them well, but never to ask them to stay with me after they have expressed a desire to go. Hence, there was nothing more to be said on either side. Her month would not be up for a week yet, and I should have an abundance of time to find some one else for the position. Spicy found me in the rocking-chair when she came up from lunch. My first inquiry was for Nursy Brown.

"She is better, and won't let me have the baby any longer. She has sent for some oysters, and ordered Myra to cook them for you."

"I don't care for them. I am not in the least hungry."

"But you will be; you know what Owen Meredith says:

'O hour of all hours, the most blessed upon earth,  
Blessed hour of our dinners!

The land of his birth;  
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;  
The twaddle of friends, and the venom of foes;

The sermon he heard, when to church he last went;  
The money he borrowed, the money he spent;—  
And many more things a man may forget,  
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet  
Never, never, oh, never! Earth's luckiest sinner  
Hath unpunished forgotten the hour of his dinner!"

That is what I call practical sentiment, Meddie. He says something more, I don't quite remember how it comes in, about,

'Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,  
Relentlessly gnawing and pursuing with some ache,'

and then another pretty idea:

'We may live without poetry, music, and art;  
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;  
We may live without friends; we may live without books,  
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.  
He may live without books—what is knowledge but grieving?  
He may live without hope—what is hope but deceiving?  
He may live without love, what is passion but pining?  
But where is the man that can live without dining?'

I suppose it will apply to woman just as well, only I don't quite subscribe to the idea that a man, or woman either, could live very long without love."

"You have managed to exist a little over sixteen years without it, haven't you?"

"Not a bit of it! don't I love you, and — well, I might get up a book on statistics; but there come your oysters! let them shut your mouth, and don't bother me."

"How would you like to read to me for awhile?" I asked, as I submitted to the temptation in my way and found my appetite increasing fast.

"That is just what I am dying to do. I am at your individual service. I have those letters in my pocket, and although I have hunted high and low, and cannot find the remainder of the one you were reading last night, I've struck another

mine, and it is the grand sequel! Pray listen with all your ears."

She changed her seat so as to get a better light upon the close writing, and read as follows:

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MINISTER AND HIS DEACON.

"MY DEAREST HELEN:

"The history of an unspoken love is, at the best, a spiritless feast, and it is only to correct false impressions that I have entered so minutely into particulars. Now I will give you a better seasoned dish.

"It was on a sultry June evening that I stood on the steps of my little church in Peculiarville waiting for Deacon Wilder, who usually walked up the street with me from the prayer-meeting. He came bustling along presently, slipped his arm through mine, and we proceeded leisurely on our way.

"Where do you propose spending your vacation?' he asked, in a confidential undertone.

"I am haunted by the blue hills of Massachusetts,' I replied. 'I have not seen them for two years. It is my present intention to visit a sister who has a cosy nest in among their fastnesses.'

"It is very cloudy, very cloudy this evening,' remarked my companion, with the air of a man whose thoughts were on some other subject.

"Yes, deacon. I apprehend showers before morning.'

"H-e-e-e-m, yes, very. H-e-e-e-m, by-the-way, Brother Gildersleeve, have you ever considered—h-e-e-e-m—how—

hem—how much more useful a young man—h-e-e-e-m—of your cloth might be in our parish if—h-e-e-e-m—if you were to take to yourself a good, pious, exemplary wife!'

"This was hardly what I expected from him. I smiled, and looked full in his face.

"Excuse me—h-e-e-e-m—I have a slight cold this evening. It was only our great regard for you that made us talk this matter over—h-e-e-e-m—a few of us, and I was appointed—h-e-e-e-m—to call your attention to the subject. There is no one in our little place whom we could select—h-e-e-e-m—as a suitable companion for you; but—h-e-e-e-m—Deacon Tomilson's wife's niece is coming to visit them, and we should very much like to have you make her acquaintance.'

"Thank you, sir,' was my quick response; 'but I have no disposition to marry—none whatever. Say so to my kind friends. If you wish to install a minister's wife over the Church, I will abdicate any moment you may desire, and thus give you an opportunity.'

"My impetuosity must have astonished the good man. He stammered in his attempt to apologize. I came boldly to the rescue.

"I fully appreciate your motives, Brother Wilder. Such thoughtfulness is eminently characteristic of my warm-hearted and zealous supporters. Matrimony, however, is a subject upon which I rarely permit any one to speak to me seriously. I received a bruise in my younger years which has never had time to heal. I always expect to labor single-handed in the vineyard of the Lord.'

"Then I suppose—h-e-e-m—that I must report the failure of a bungling ambassador,' said Deacon Wilder, shaking my hand warmly and bidding me good-night.

"And he did. Not only that, but his wife whispered the news, that Mr. Gildersleeve had been crossed in love, to every lady member of my church and congregation, and that he had positively declined to make the acquaintance of Miss Helen Hortense. You were entirely innocent of any part in the plot, and might have been spared their idle tattle. But, as it is, you shall have the whole romance, and then execute judgment.

"The following week, on Tuesday, I found myself one cloudy afternoon standing on the little platform of the station-house at Clover Glen. It had grown into quite a pretty village since I was last that way. Paper-mills, woollen-mills, balmoral-mills, cotton-mills, warp-mills, and other kindred establishments, were flourishing in every direction. Two or three churches had gone up like sky-rockets, and cottages, large and small, and white and brown, and Gothic and plain, were scattered without regard to streets, wherever there was a good place to build."

"I suppose," said Spicy, pausing and looking up at me, "that they laid out the streets to suit the houses, as I once bought my dress to match my gloves."

Then she read on:

"There were pretty yards tastefully cultivated, and plenty of yards uncultivated, simply serving as pens to catch the dirt in, and there were mountains set up all about like a wall of protection

against the wiles of the wicked world and the fresh summer breezes.

"With my valise in my hand I walked leisurely up the main street, hunting for a house with two wings, as the residence of my sister Phebe had been described to me. All at once a hand was laid upon my arm, and a voice exclaimed:

"Grandison! by Jove! How came you here?"

"It was my brother Fred, my junior some four years, as I presume you are already aware. He gave me half-a-dozen slaps on the shoulder, and shook my hand until the joints cracked like castanets.

"By rail—and you? I thought you were coining gold on Wall Street! I am proud to hear that you are developing quite a remarkable talent for business. How is Phebe?"

"Tip-top. Why didn't you announce your coming? She would have killed the fatted calf if she had known it. As it is, she has nearly killed herself getting ready to engineer a pleasure excursion to Gray Lock to-morrow. We start at five o'clock in the morning."

"I intended to have written, but I was uncertain about the date of starting until the last minute. However, I am agreeable to Gray Lock, if you will take me along. I should like that trip above the clouds; it will remind me of by-gones."

"We had by this time reached the house, and I was received by Phebe most affectionately. Her home was a little gem of comfort. I had not seen another such since dear old Rockland Place passed out of our family possession. She was blooming as a rose, and emanated sunshine whichever way she turned.

"What a windfall you are, Grand-ison, just at this particular time!" she said.

"Which, interpreted, is to say, that, as soon as circumstances will permit, she will be much obliged to these two members of the masculine persuasion if they will walk into the kitchen and help her make sandwiches until sunset," remarked Fred.

"No, indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! What is the use in denying it? You know you sent me to the grocery for some tongues a short time ago, and ordered me to make all possible haste, because, you said, there would be hardly time to get every thing ready to-night anyhow. I am not going to spoil a story for the sake of a minister. Besides, he is old enough and big enough to work, and your old adage applies in his case—"a certain amount of misery is necessary for the enjoyment of life."

"I immediately expressed my extreme willingness to cut meat, butter bread, pack chicken, or eat cake, as the master of ceremonies should direct.

"The master is a mistress," said Fred.

"I corrected myself accordingly.

"Phebe declared the picnic was of no such vital consequence. She wanted to sit down and talk with me. But Fred wouldn't let her.

"Business first, and then pleasure," he said. "When one is in an official position he must face his obligations. Such honors are cheap at that."

"The facts of the case were that Phebe, and one or two young lady friends, had projected the expedition, intending that it should occupy two

days, remaining on the mountain all night in order to see the sun rise. About seventy of the villagers were enlisted, and a party from Williamstown were to join them on the mountain. Each individual was expected to carry a basket; and for the general dinner and breakfast supplies were sent to Phebe's kitchen, and some colored men had been hired to carry them up on their backs.

"Fred was in his element. Nothing ever suited him half so well as a frolic. He was a handsome young man of the world, prided himself upon his fine forehead, brown wavy hair, and bewitching eyes; was tall, well built, a perfect athlete in his movements, and having earned the unenviable reputation of lady-killer, was nothing loth to play a few pranks for the benefit of the country damsels whom he might meet on this eventful occasion. He was the most helpful of helps during the afternoon and evening, and laid the good things into baskets according to the latest prescribed rule. I stood by and did the looking on, and encouraged Phebe to let those who would work do the work. Her husband, Richard Haywood, arrived from Boston on the eight-o'clock train, and entered into the arrangements with great spirit. Some young ladies came in to discuss questions of policy and performance, and loitered long enough to flirt a little with Fred. I heard him wickedly suggesting to one of them to try to catch that 'red-headed old bachelor,' meaning your humble servant.

"So you have commenced making game of me already?" I remarked, after they had gone.

"Who ever knew a Gildersleeve who

could not fight his own battles?' was all I got in reply.

"The morning was fair, and the procession was under way at the appointed hour. I was not more than half awake when we took our seats at Phebe's breakfast-table, but I remember distinctly every good thing upon it—coffee, hot rolls, fried ham, and cold mush. I complained of a fair appetite, considering the hour. The truth is, I am an advocate of sleep. My advice to young people (of all ages) is, to get all they can. Never mind that old-fashioned doctrine about early rising:

*'Thomson, who sung about the seasons, said  
It was a glorious thing to rise in season;  
But then he said it—lying—in his bed  
At ten A. M.—the very reason  
He wrote so charmingly. The simple fact is,  
His preaching wasn't sanctioned by his practice.*

*'Tis doubtless well to be sometimes awake—  
Awake to duty, and awake to truth;  
But when, alas! a nice review we take  
Of our best deeds and days, we find, in sooth,  
The hours that leave the slightest cause to weep  
Are those we passed in childhood, or—sleep!'*

"'Hallo,' said Fred, when the springless wagon which was to convey us to the base of the mountain stopped before the door. 'There are just six of us officers, and as the vehicle has three seats, then, according to Colbourn, we must ride two on a seat. Dear Mrs. Haywood, may I have the felicity of riding by your side?'

"I fancied there was more than one pang of disappointment when the sister thus carried off the star of the morning; but I made my best bow and handed in Miss Emily Juniper, who maintained great dignity in her gold-bowed glasses and faded hair. Brother Richard had a nice sociable time on the front seat with Katy Sparkle.

"The road was dusty and rough, and mostly up-hill. We stopped every few minutes to let the other wagons overtake us. At a pair of bars opening into a bleak pasture we alighted, and sent the wagons back to the village. From there we walked a good half-mile to the foot of the modest old mountain, the highest in the Bay State, and which needs but a Bryant or a Bierstadt to render it famous.

"Meanwhile the sun was high enough in the heavens to pour down its scorching rays. There is a remarkable spring just as we enter the woods, and we all stopped to drink and fill our canteens. From that point the ascent was toilsome, and before we were half way to the summit our water failed and we were nearly famished with thirst. There were covetous eyes fixed upon some tin pails which formed a part of the luggage, and, at one place where we stopped to rest, there was a mysterious silence prevailing for a time among the gentlemen. All at once the startling rumor floated through the air that the pails contained nothing.

"There was a panic, to which the recent stir in Wall Street was a mere bubble. The lady managers of the dinner looked at each other in hopeless despair.

"'What shall we do?' exclaimed Katy Sparkle, pulling off one of her green-kid gloves and pushing back her flaxen ringlets with her bare hand.

"'Is it possible! no milk at all for our tea and coffee!' ejaculated Miss Emily Juniper, looking over her glasses.

"'We had a six-quart pail of pure cream!' said Phebe, regarding me with interest as I martyred myself by car-

rying two waterproofs, three parasols, a pair of overshoes, and a cane.

"Well! It is what I call a little worse than stealing sheep!" remarked Richard, as he worried along under the weight of a folded tent.

"I wish I knew who did it!" whispered Mrs. Cady to Mrs. Puttywell.

"So do I! It is mean! contemptible! despicable! selfish! sneaky! outrageous! Mrs. Haywood went all over the village to collect it, and I put in every bit I took from yesterday's milk. I wish I could just get hold of the person who dared to steal it!" said the latter in an emphatic manner.

"What is up?" cried Fred, overtaking us.

"Katy Sparkle explained.

"I thought as much," he replied. "I saw brother Grandison drawing his head out of something very like a tin pail. I heard you talking rather loud up here ahead of me, and, thinking I could shed a little light on the subject, I put to the rescue. Say, look a here, man!" and he confronted me, taking hold of my coat-collar on either side of my neck and nearly shaking my wits into next week, 'What did you drink that milk for?'

"It was not a very nice position for an orthodox minister and the editor of a leading religious paper to stand thus accused before a band of strangers!

"Answer me!" he thundered, giving me another tremendous shake. 'What did you drink that milk for?'

"Because I did not know any better."

"What had I said! How could I have been so absurdly stupid as to confess to the doing of such a deed! Could

I recall my unfortunate words? Should I be believed if I did recall them?'

"Come this way," said Richard shortly after. 'There are some Pittsfield ladies to whom I should like to introduce you.'

"I was glad of an escape from an embarrassing predicament, and followed him at once. Imagine my confusion when he presented me, with all due formality, as 'the man who drank the milk!'

"I scarcely heard my true name again that day. My two brothers had an endless amount of fun at my expense. After reaching the top of the mountain we rested ourselves for a season on the soft side of flat rocks, and then the more active and ambitious of the party made preparations for dinner. A fire was built, water prestidigitated by the colored boys, tea and coffee made, and sundry bits of cooking done. I amused myself with a small telescope, tracing out the White Mountains in the distance, Mount Monadnock to the right, the Catskill and Adirondacks to the broad left, and hills upon hills, picturesque valleys, and gleaming lakes in the immediate foreground.

"It was four o'clock P. M. when I was escorted to a tent and placed at the head of a sumptuous repast, Turk fashion. Fred was high chief waiter, and a bevy of pretty girls followed in his wake. Everybody was in a merry mood, and the good things disappeared swiftly. I was favored with some strong black tea which I could not drink without my usual trimmings, and the first I knew I was laid violent hands upon, and the vile stuff was poured down my throat as if I were a small child sick with the measles



and would not take my medicine. Then, I was toasted as *the man who drank the milk*, and was obliged to respond with a speech. I was pestered, and persecuted, and laughed at. But, strange as it may seem, the ladies ceased to regard my crime with horror and aversion, and vied with each other in their kind attentions to me as the affair obtained publicity.

"Were you accustomed to drinking milk in your boyhood?" asked Mrs. Puttywell, with an expression of great interest on her face.

"Yes, I was brought up on a farm."

"That accounts for it, then—your liking for it now. But I can't see how you could manage to drink so much!"

"Neither could Katy Sparkle, nor Mrs. Cady, nor Miss Emily Juniper. The latter looked concerned, and asked me twice if I was quite well.

"Habit, habit," said Richard; "if he had only had a Rev. Mrs. Grandison to have gone through life with him, he would never have got in such a way."

"Nor worn that happy and serene look and leghorn hat," said Fred, flourishing his black beaver.

"It was my turn to speak after a while, and I challenged Fred for a story. He was a capital story-teller.

"Won't do it unless you will answer a question which I am going to propound."

"What is it?"

"Why have you never married?"

"For two reasons—both good ones. Because I had an idea that I shouldn't like to see my wife make a beefsteak answer for two meals, use the fragments for soup the third day, and manufacture hash out of the remains all the rest of the week,

and my parish never voted me salary enough to provide more liberally. And, secondly and lastly, I have not succeeded in finding the lady who had the three qualifications I require."

"Only three! Pray do tell us what they are!" cried Katy Sparkle.

"Good sense, good humor, and good health."

"What a combination of excellences!" said Richard.

"No wonder he is a single man!" said Fred.

"Not even an eye for beauty! ah, Grandison!" said Phebe.

"Fulfil your part of the programme now," I said, addressing Fred.

"We made him stand on a stone to entertain the company. He did so, and his humorous description of a recent robbery was very enjoyable. A gang of desperadoes had planned and executed an assault upon some unprotected property, and so successfully had it been accomplished under the very eyes of a crowd of people, that the offence rested only upon the head of one man, and he innocent!"

"Brother Grandison!" said he, in conclusion, "since you have had the credit of the sin and none of the cream, I must admonish you, in the presence of all these witnesses, to remember the good dog Tray."

"In the midst of the laughter that followed, we saw the Williamstown party coming over the brow of the hill from the west. A committee went forward to greet them, and there was quite a stir all round. The Clover Glenites separated into select little groups sitting on the grass, and under the dwarfish shrub-

bery. I returned to my telescope and sermonized a little.

"A lady and gentleman, sauntering along, stopped directly in front of me. The latter was a scholarly-looking man, advanced in years, with snowy hair and a gold-headed cane. The lady was young, of a light, graceful figure and stylish air. I could see only a portion of her face, which was of marble whiteness, but there was a world of quiet strength in the curves of her well-shaped mouth. She wore a gray travelling-dress of some summer fabric unrelieved by even a bow of bright ribbon. She was saying to her companion:

"With trouble we acquire strength, uncle. I am equal to any course of action which my better judgment approves. I have not yet had time —"

"She turned partly round at that moment, and the words seemed to freeze to her lips. Her eyes were riveted upon me! And mine? Need I say more, than that I stood face to face with Ida Everett!

"In the life of every one, I believe, there are sudden transitions of feeling which seem almost miraculous! As if some magician had touched the heavens and the earth, the dark clouds melt into thin air, the winds are hushed, and serenity succeeds the storm. Looking into her eyes and seeing myself mirrored there, all my doubts and misgivings vanished. It was a brief, blessed interchange of soul with soul. Why, oh, why had I been so foolishly false to the promptings of my heart in those far back days? Why had I housed up the love that wellnigh consumed me, let the golden hour of promise pass, suppressed

the longing cry that was on my lips, and erected a barrier of ice over all my finer and better feelings? Inexplicable folly! I might have known that she was mine, and captured the flying years. It was perfectly clear to me now. How could I have been so mistaken, so misguided? Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when the soul is kneeling, no matter what the attitude of the body may be. Ah! my love was taking shape and form, and I took her outstretched hand.

"She introduced me to her uncle, Judge Shubill, and we chattered pleasantly, all three of us. Phebe coming that way, was thrown into a great state of rejoicing by meeting the dear friend of her girlhood, whom she had not seen since she graduated. Richard following, was introduced, and joined our party, but Fred was more agreeably occupied elsewhere. We found seats on the rocks and settled ourselves for a talk. We exhumed Rockland Place and painted it up in fresh colors. We wandered through the fields and meadows and picked clover-blossoms and dandelions. We visited North Pond, that unique body of water on the top of a high hill, and picked huckleberries in a row-boat. We took drives after the horse that always shied at white paper, and had two or three upsets in rough places by way of a reminiscence. We dissected the good people of the neighborhood, laughed over Mrs. Cook and the captain, and the post-master and his wife, and went to church on Sundays, and held full-dress receptions while the congregation gathered. Sadly and tenderly were spoken the names of my father and mother, and loving allu-

sions made to their many virtues and accomplishments, and their better home in the spirit-world. Kind words! Heaven-born immortalities! Their influence is stamped upon the future when the past has sealed the lips which uttered them. Let them live on forever and forever!

"Strange freak of fate which had thus thrown me into the magnetic presence of the woman whose image I had been trying to tear from my heart for so many years! My ears were tingling once more with the music of the voice which had taught me the lesson of life in a new rhythm! and oh, how greedily I caught every pearl which fell from her lips! As in those early days she charmed by entering entirely into the moods of those about her, drawing forth by her genial appreciation their best gifts, and rendering them entirely at home with themselves; as in her daily life then, so in her conversation now, she displayed singular sweetness of temper and forgetfulness of self, combined with fine intuitive perceptions; and I, who had been groping so stupidly in a labyrinth of error, emerged into a mysterious alchemy of light, with newly-awakened perceptions. I had suddenly found myself in the attitude of a man impatiently waiting for the right moment when he could do homage before the world to the woman of his choice.

"Meanwhile another banquet had been preparing for the more recent comers, and the judge and his niece were led away, promising to meet us again in the evening. Phebe had duties that required her attention, and excused herself, saying:

"Richard, it is a good time for your

cigars while we are getting the tents spread and candles lighted.'

"True,' and he started to get them.

"The boxes were not where they had been left. He instituted a search which occupied some moments. Finally, some one spied them partly covered by the leaves in a little hollow of earth. But the fine havanas which they had contained were not to be found.

"It is those darkeys,' he said, scowling and shaking his head.

"They were sitting in a row under a little pine-tree a few rods below us, apparently absorbed in viewing the landscape. He stepped lightly over the bank and called out:

"Peter!

"Yes-er,' and in the flash of an eye the boy stood up and faced about.

"Did you take my cigars?"

"Nos-er, never touched a cigar in my life.'

"What! don't you smoke?"

"Nos-er, never smoked a cigar in my life.'

"How is that? don't you like cigars?"

"Don-nos-er, never smoked a cigar in my life.'

"His hands were behind him, and at that instant a stream of fire shot up in the background and singed both his hands and his hair. He jumped into the air with great, dilated eyes, and then wailed and agonized over his smarts.

"So you never smoked a cigar in your life, eh?" said Richard, with his eyes resting upon the poor stump of one which had done the mischief.

"Ohs-er, I'll never steal another cigar, never, as long as I live! Ohs-er, I'll

never steal another cigar! my hand! oh, my hand!' and he blew and shook the unlucky member. 'Ohs-er, I'll never steal another cigar as long as I live!'

"We could none of us restrain our laughter, and the old mountain resounded with the uproar. The fire, meanwhile, which had kindled in the dry grass and stubble, crept along aided by the wind, and assumed a serious aspect. There was no water to be had, consequently we did battle with stones, moss, and dirt, and in the end conquered. But the moon was up and the wee small hours approaching when we buried the hatchet and smoked the pipe of peace once more. The laborers were served with refreshments by the ladies of the committee. One of the Williamstown ladies brought me a cup of coffee, and described something to me while I drank it, no doubt very interesting, but spoken in what seemed a lost language. I was thinking about Ida Everett, and wondering how I was going to get an opportunity of seeing her before the party retired to the tents. We were standing in front of one then, with its great blank black eye taking in every thing, and giving out nothing in return, save the dim length of vacant space. I looked at my watch by the light of a feeble lamp, which stood inside a pail. There are moments with rusty, broken locks, which refuse to open to the crowding joys that wait beyond. This was one. I returned my cup with suitable acknowledgments. Then I reached up and cut a branch from one of the trees to keep off the musquitoes. I watched a shadow coming toward me—no, it was a form clear-cut and presently distinct in outline. A faint rustle

of drapery, a light foot-fall, and then the words:

"'Oh! Mr. Gildersleeve! I hardly knew you in the dark!'

"I was intoxicated with delight. The hour longed for come at last! And with it the feeling—which all men know—that it was the one jewelled opportunity which must not be allowed to escape. I offered her my arm for a brief turn over the scarred, seamed rocks to the region of the late fire. There followed winged moments. I told her all. She tried to interrupt me, but I would not permit it. It was an earnest, sincere outpouring of the pent-up love of years. And I made her listen, listen to the end, although she let go my arm and sobbed convulsively.

"In the light of the new moon, which was shining over my shoulders and full in her face, I stood with folded arms waiting her reply. I could see pity flash from her drowned eyes, and then a hot carnation scorch up the tears from her cheeks. Twice she essayed to speak, and hesitated, painfully; then, gathering strength and growing calm and cold in her demeanor, and planting each word like a sword thrust through my heart, she said:

"'Of course you are ignorant of the facts—how could you know them? I have been married two years!'

"In order, I suppose, to relieve me from any further embarrassment she abruptly bade me good-night. I never saw her again. I hardly know how the hours were passed until we returned to Clover Glen. I remember but indistinctly the surprise and regrets of my sister and brothers when I announced my intention of going to Europe for a

six or eight weeks' trip. They knew nothing of the pain I was seeking to dislodge.

"I cannot tell how long it was before I was able to say: Welcome, disappointment! thy hand is cold and hard, but it is the hand of a friend! I have taken sorrow to my heart, made it a part of me, and nourished it until it has made me strong again. The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun. But the brightness of life is not gone. There is darkness for a season, and then light illumines the eastern horizon and we live again.

"I was sitting in my room before a bright, blazing fire in the hotel of the Piazza del Popolo at the foot of the Pincian Hill in the Eternal City, when the letter of Deacon Tomilson, enclosing your picture, reached me. I glanced at the strange Italian fireplace which allowed so much heat to escape up the chimney; at the curious andirons—miniature sphinxes crouched with serene faces amid the flames; at the ceiling, with its half-classic, half-grotesque frescoes, and at the water-basin and pitcher set in a frame resting on a tripod, while my thoughts went back to sacrificial fires. Then I studied the pretty, interesting face on the card before me, and evil whisperings in my ears suggested *sacrificial fires*.

"That night my pen traced the few lines that set afloat the rumor that I was about to resign my charge in Peculiarville. If to return was to meet you, I felt that I could not return there. But gradually I became more self-contained; change of scene, as well as time, conduced to the restoration of both mental

and bodily health, and when the earnest appeals of an attached people reached me on my homeward voyage, I had no language at command wherewith to refuse.

"We met, dear Helen, and I have learned your worth. The future is in your hands. My heart is all laid bare. I have kept nothing back. Perhaps we shall yet discover that between a perfect friendship and a perfect love there is a fainter distinction than many people imagine. May you be guided in all wisdom, and may Heaven's choicest blessings rest upon your head, is the sincere prayer of  
G. G."

## CHAPTER VI.

### SPICY'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

"I would like to wring that man's neck!" said Spicy, throwing down the letter impatiently.

"Why so? The matter seems to have regulated itself as such matters do, and, while there was much to be regretted, I don't see that, under the circumstances, there was any thing that could be helped. If the lady Helen saw fit to take him, I have no doubt he made her a good husband."

"Oh, dear, yes; I suppose likely, being as—

'It is man's philosophy  
When woman is untrue,  
The loss of one but teaches him  
To make another do.'

But he no need to have been so unreasonably selfish as to have wasted all this immense pile of French paper talking about his own love-affairs, and dropped his brother Fred like a hot potato! I was just getting interested in the young man, and never stopped reading when I

got hoarse and my eyes smarted, because I thought I was going to get another full-length view of him! My heart is dead broke!"

"It is too bad! Perhaps you will find something of him in the other letters."

"No, I guess not. I am in total despair. They look like regular engagement missives from beginning to end. Here is something about a ring, and a little farther on they are going to the city to buy traps for house-keeping. They are coming back the same day, so Peculiarville isn't far from New York. Then they are going to have some new Venetian-shutters on the little white church, which is just beyond the covered bridge, and a new carpet for the minister's pew. But never a word about the glorious Fred! I wonder if he went to the wedding! I wonder if he does his nice brown hair up in curl-papers every night to make it wavy!"

"You must keep an eye out for him when you go to New York in the fall."

"What advice for a sister to give! Me do such a thing as that! What do you suppose would become of me if I was to try it? I expect, as long as I am in Miss Gilbert's boarding-school, that I shall be required to shut my eyes every time I go in the street, and march with a teacher on each side of me. I like him though, as near as I can get at him. I must go back and read it over, what his brother says."

"Meanwhile I will go down-stairs and inspect my whereabouts, for I am like a stranger in a strange land. I have given the subject so little attention."

"Your head is better, is it?"

"Yes, indeed. I am almost as good as new."

I went to the parlor first, a square room with a large window on each of three sides, and was not a little surprised to find it in perfect order. The carpet was my old medallion, and must have fitted pretty well, save a portion cut from the length. The piano stood "on the bias," as Spicy would say, across one corner of the room, and the large sofa was its *vis-à-vis* in the same position across the other. The easy-chairs, and the tables, and the ornaments, were arranged in the best possible good taste, and the effect was so inviting that I took a seat. The only incongruity that glared upon me in my pleased frame of mind was a plain iron gas-fixture with two arms, one of which pointed toward a sweet, pensive, mellow landscape in oil, by Inman, which hung over my elegant bronze clock on the mantel, and the other preserved a threatening attitude in the direction of the front window.

The little entrance to the parlor from the street was an oblong space about four feet by six. A door opened from it also into the library, a smaller room than the parlor, and which communicated with the latter by another door beyond the mantel. I found this looking even more attractive than the parlor, although it accommodated very much less furniture. My books were lying on the floor in the curiously constructed bay-window recess, for the want of a case, otherwise every article had struck an attitude, and the grand whole was kindly suggestive of family circles and winter evenings.

The dining-room was just beyond,

"all hunka-dori," Spicy had said, when I had asked her, in the morning, of its welfare and general appearance, and from it a door led into the great north hall, at the left of which was the kitchen. I was particularly struck by the number of closets and pantries which burst upon me from every nook, and corner, and turn, and which are of such immense use for storing surplus goods. I was not at all surprised either to find them filled, for I remembered my nine loads of yesterday.

Nursy Brown was in the kitchen looking over the silver. She was pale, very pale, and looked wan and weary. The faintest shadow of a smile played round her lips as she expressed the hope that I was better. I tried to put into proper phraseology my grateful acknowledgments to her for benefits received, but my words seemed meaningless and fell, like dead weights, far below their aim. I believe I hinted at some possible reward for her valuable assistance in so many and unexpected ways; and then I wished I had not said any thing, for she was all at once invested in a halo of superiority which I could not fathom, and my remarks were evidently distasteful to her. She gazed through the window with a strange, stunned quietude, a sort of dead apathy, and had the bearing of one upon whom fate had spent its last blow. I had never observed her so closely before, or had this change come over her recently?

I inquired after Bright, and found that he was asleep. I discussed the family bill of fare, sent Maggie for Cousin Phil, and wrote some orders for the

butcher and the baker and the grocer. Then I examined the fastenings of the windows and doors, and at last visited the blue-room, to which I was followed by Nursy Brown.

"I have driven a nail into the window-sash in the closet for additional security," she said, "although it seems perfectly impregnable without it."

"A wise precaution," I replied. "I wish we could fasten the closet door, too."

But that was not so easy a matter. There seemed to be no good place for a lock, although we found afterward that the putting of one on was not an impossibility. Nursy Brown quite agreed with me in thinking it best not to apprise Cousin Phil of our strange experience of the previous night, but to be ready to run to his aid should we hear the slightest alarm.

"Of course nothing will happen," I said.

Phil came about eight o'clock. He was a natty, lively fellow of two-and-twenty, of a tallish figure, quite stout and firmly built, and passed for a much older man than he really was. He had a fine voice whenever he chose to air it, and was admirably educated on at least three musical instruments. Spicy opened the piano, and fresh, animated, and amiable, the two sang and played until I warned them that my hour had come for retiring.

"I wish you would let me sleep in your room," said Spicy, opening my door a crack and whispering through it, just as I was ready for bed.

"Come in. What is the matter?"

"Nothing yet. But I think I could

entertain my ghost better if I was not quite alone. I am not the least bit brilliant, you know, and you could nudge me with your elbow and whisper something in my ear to say, if my vocabulary failed."

"Then you propose having an interview, Phil to the contrary notwithstanding."

"That is my present expectation. So I may stay, may I? Thank you. Now I am going to name my bedposts, and get into bed backwards without speaking a word, so as to have my dreams come to pass. See, bedpost number *one* shall be Fred Gildersleeve; bedpost number *two*—well, I guess I will name it Fred Gildersleeve too; bedpost number *three* shall be Fred Gildersleeve to keep the others company, and bedpost number *four* shall be Fred Gildersleeve, to make the number even. Now, don't disturb me after I've said my prayers."

I was greatly diverted by her ludicrous endeavors to climb over the footboard in the manner specified. And then I tried to induce her to break the mystic charm by answering some trivial questions, but she turned her face to the wall and her silence was a success.

I did not fall asleep readily. I heard the cars come in train after train, and people were driving on the avenue very late. The air was warm and sultry, unusually so for that season of the year, and I heard an occasional rumble of thunder. It stormed at last. I could feel the wind jarring that part of the building which I occupied, and the rain beat against the windows. Then it subsided, but occasionally my room was illumined by a vivid flash of lightning,

and there were ominous roarings among the branches of the trees in the yard.

Was that a step in the hall?—like some one blundering in the dark! My head was raised from my pillow, and my ears keenly alive. Some one at my door! Yes; the latch was moving, stealthily moving—it creaked a little, for it was old and worn and uncoiled. The door was opening slowly. It was too dark for me to see it, but I knew and felt it all the same. A white figure approached the bed.

"Who is that?" I had just barely strength to gasp.

"Me, ma'am," was the prompt reply, and never was the broad Irish accent more acceptable to my ears. "Oh, Mrs. Belmore, this is the dreadfulest house I ever seen! We shall all be murdered; there is ever so many robbers down stairs!"

"What!—what do you say?"

I sprang up in great alarm.

"They've tried our window and got it wide open, and Myra and me both seen 'em in the lightnin'. Then we seen another man before the glass window, when we was runnin' through the north hall, and there was a big rattle in the dinin'-room like as if there was a lot of 'em in there. Myra has gone to hide in Nursy Brown's room, and I've come here."

I was at the bureau by that time, and having drawn a match across the sandpaper we were relieved of the murky darkness, if nothing more.

"Stay here, Maggie, and I will call Phil."

I threw my wrapper about me and ran into the hall, but stopped to light the



gas there before I went on. Phil was sound asleep, and I knocked three times before I got an—

"Ugh—ugh—what do you want?"

"Please get up quick and come down stairs with me. There is somebody in the house."

I stepped along to Nursy Brown's door, and found the gas lighted and the baby awake. She was trying to quiet him, so I did not go in. At that moment Phil put his head into the hall, with his hair standing up straight like a drove of porcupine quills.

"What is up, Meddie?"

"That is what I want to find out. Make haste!"

"I will be on hand in a second."

I ran back to my room and brought a candle which I always kept there.

"Got a sledge-hammer, or a pop-gun, or any thing dangerous?" he asked, as he sallied forth equipped even to his boots.

"We will go down the north stairs," I said, ignoring his sarcasm.

"What! You going with me to keep me from getting hurt?"

"Yes, or for any other good reason you may be pleased to give."

"So be it; but let me take the candle," and he preceded me.

In the centre of the kitchen he stopped and faced about.

"Meddie, please tell me what we are looking for?"

I repeated the servant's story to him, and we went on through the laundry to their room, which opened out of it on the ground-floor. Sure enough, the window was open as Maggie had said, and the end of a broom-handle, cut to fit, supported it!

"They first put a knife up between the two sashes and sawed off the miserable old fastening," said Phil, after examining it carefully and closing the window, without seeming at all startled by the circumstance. "However, they must be half way to Calumet by this time, so we needn't have any more fears to-night."

I told him I should like to have a nail put in, but he found that the broom-handle would do just as well, being the same length as the upper sash, and resting upon the top of the lower one so firmly that it could not be moved. We went through the lower part of the house, which was undisturbed, and we presumed the burglars, finding themselves discovered, had beat a retreat without making any further attempts to enter. Phil offered to sit up until morning if I wished it, but it seemed quite unnecessary, and he went back to his room. I stepped in to see Nursy Brown, who was lying very white and still beside my baby, holding one of his little, pin-cushiony hands in her own. Myra was sitting in a high, straight-backed chair by the table, and looked as if she was just about to set out for the gallows.

I told them the result of our explorations and the conclusions to which we had arrived. Myra shook her head:

"It is the dreadful house, ma'am! It will kill me. I cannot stay another night, indeed I cannot. They's been all over it. I seen 'em in the dining-room, and right up here in this very hall I put my hand on one when we was a creepin' away to save ourselves. He had a skin like a snake, and it was all greasy like, and his eyes rolled at me," and she put

both hands over her face and drew short, sharp breaths.

Free as I have always been from superstitious fears, I sincerely believe that if I had heard that speech twenty minutes sooner I never should have gone down-stairs. But, as it was, I had been over the infested ground, and was satisfied that the whole disturbance had proceeded from natural causes. I tried to imbue Myra with my own opinions, but she was obdurate.

"Them's no robbers," was the summing up of her expressed belief.

I went to my room and found that Spicy had not waked. Maggie, worn out with fatigue and loss of sleep, and probably quite relieved from any sense of danger while under my immediate protection, had curled herself up on the floor, laid her head on a chair, and gone to the land of dreams also. I could hardly make up my mind to wake her and send her back to her room, scared and trembling as she would naturally be, under the circumstances, so I let her remain until morning. I got a little sleep with the gas shining full in my face, for I hadn't the courage to turn it out, but it was in snatches and not at all to my satisfaction.

Maggie went down quite early, soon after daylight, but I suppose she talked over the affairs of the night with Myra before she went about her morning work, as it was nearly eight o'clock when she went to the front-door to put out the mat and sweep off the stoop. The next moment she came running up-stairs, out of breath:

"Mrs. Belmore! Mrs. Belmore! The front-door has gone and been left open all-night!"

Did we look to that when we were running about the house? I strained my brain to remember. Surely not. We did not go into that little hall-entry at all. The robbers must have gone through the house and out that way.

As soon as practicable I hurried down to learn particulars. Maggie told me how she found the door standing, and I traced large, muddy footprints on the floor of the painted veranda.

"Poor fellows! they have had all their trouble for nothing! They got frightened away before they had a chance to steal any thing!" I said.

"They'll come back, I suppose," replied Maggie, with a mournful cadence.

Something like a shriek caught my ear at that moment, and I flew up the stairs much faster than I had descended them. The door of Spicy's room was standing open, and she in her night-clothes was holding to the latch for support. I stood there too—for full five minutes without uttering an exclamation. The sight fairly struck me dumb.

"Put on your clothes, deary. I want to call Phil to see this," was my first remark.

"I will go back to your room. I am sick," and, bursting into tears, Spicy disappeared.

Nursy Brown came out of the nursery when I called Phil, and, as he had finished putting every particular hair in its proper place, he was ready to respond immediately.

"Where's the show?" he called out.

But it was not so far off that he needed a guide. Nursy Brown had already stepped into Spicy's room, and we followed closely in her wake.

"Ginger! that is rather rough! By George, what a knife! They were no myth after all, were they, coz? Have you found out what is gone?"

No, I had not got so far. It had been sufficient for me until now to see what they had left. Tumbled bureau-drawers, wide open, the contents of overhauled trunks scattered here and there, chairs lying on their backs as if in consequence of a hasty exit, and a horrible knife several inches in length, and with two sharpened edges, standing upright on the floor near the bed, where it had, no doubt, been dropped accidentally!

"I don't know what Spicy had to tempt the miserable thieves—not much money at any rate!" I said, stepping along and taking a more careful survey of her upper drawer. "Queer that they should have aimed for this room! If they had fallen upon mine they would have got a better haul, or even down-stairs, where my silver is stored!"

"What is this?"

Phil was pulling something from under a pile of clothing on the floor. Alas! it was my jewelry-box, bottom upward, just as it had been thrown down and — empty!

Spicy had brought it from my room yesterday morning to amuse the baby with, had thrown the treasures back into it carelessly and set it on a chair, and forgotten all about it as the other events of the day crowded themselves upon her notice.

Poor child! She was sobbing most piteously upon my bed with her face buried in the pillow, when I went for her.

"Never mind, deary, don't feel so; come and tell us what you have lost," I said, kissing her.

"What I have lost! it is what you have lost through my heedlessness that I care for! If I had put that box back where I got it, as I intended to do, or if I hadn't touched it in the first place, this would not have happened. Oh, Meddie! your beautiful watch that Leonardus gave you on your wedding-day, and those precious charms, the very greyhound that the Pope blessed, and such a chain! I am sure there never was another like it! And your pearls, which I have always taken such pride in seeing you wear, and if there ever was one thing I wanted more than another it was to have just such a set for a bridal present; and your solitaire diamond, and the garnet set, and those buttons, the last gift of dear papa, and the rings which I taught little Bright to call *stars*, and he spoke it almost as plain as I do this minute! Oh, dear! dear! dear! it was all my fault! what shall I do! what shall I do!"

"How do you know they are all gone? there has been no search made yet! Every thing is upside down in your room. Perhaps we shall find them, but you must come and help, because it is your things that are tumbled about."

"It is no use. I feel it in my bones. The moment I looked in that door it all came to me. How that old *scalawag* eyed the jewelry when he was bothering about the bill, and how I did not have the sense to put it away! I suppose the knife was to have done me if I had been there to make a noise! Oh, dear! dear! dear! I should have deserved my fate;" and her distress was not to be soothed

by any words of mine just then. Meanwhile Nursy Brown had gathered up Spicy's disturbed possessions and hunted in vain for the missing valuables. The robbers had got what they came for, and left all the rest. Spicy's dainty little watch was still under her pillow where she had put it before coming to my room the night before, but her pocket-book had been taken from her bureau. The only smile which lighted up her tear-stained face that day was when reference was made to the latter:

"How they will be sold! It has only ten cents in it!"

There were a good many footprints in the soft earth on the garden side of the house, and upon close examination we determined that no less than three persons had been prowling about the premises during the night. The other end of the broom-handle was under the servants' window, where it had been cut off and thrown into the grass.

"That huge old knife did good service," said Phil, as he picked up the evidence of its work.

One of the men we tracked through the north gate of the grounds, and another through the front. Phil got a pair of scissors and a paper, and tried to take a pattern of the footprint of the latter. He succeeded partially, and sent Maggie up to Spicy with it to inquire what number she thought that man wore for a boot! Then he seemed to be following a trail through the rear part of the yard, and came back quite excited.

"It is a woman's foot as sure as you live!"

I could hardly credit the statement, but in one place near the grape-arbor

the impression was perfect, and I was of the same opinion as soon as my eyes rested upon it. And a very delicate little foot it must have been.

"Here is where she climbed over the fence and escaped into the alley."

"I must find out what it means. I will set detectives at work," I said, excitedly.

It was long years, however, before I did find out what those woman footprints meant. Within an hour the chief of police had all the details of the robbery, its possible bearings, and suspicious connections. I was convinced that my old moving man was at the bottom of it all. Yet the catching of him was quite another thing, since Maggie had picked him up that eventful May morning, on the corner of some street, she could not tell where, and of course nobody could tell whither he went. But the property was of such a nature, and could be so easily identified, that I had great hopes of its being eventually recovered. I was philosophic and even cheerful under the loss, for it might have been much more serious, I reasoned. I endeavored to comfort Spicy whenever I could find a moment to spare, who was blaming herself continually, and declaring that she should never be willing to look Leonardus in the face again. Indeed, she reiterated all the old threadbare superstitions she had ever heard or read of in regard to the losing of wedding finery, and seemed to think she had committed the unpardonable sin by being accessory to it. As a final resort, I turned her thoughts into a new channel by asking what she had dreamed about Fred Gildersleeve, after all her trouble.

"Bless your heart, I thought he turned up in the ghost-closet, out of the blue room! He was dressed in ridiculous short-clothes and knee-buckles! He shook his finger at me just as Paul Gibbon used to do when he was superintendent and I did not behave in Sabbath-school, and said I should rue the day I ever touched those old letters! I tell you, Meddie, as I told you in the first place, that they are certainly mixed up with my destiny somehow! I don't believe it was right to find them!"

"That is a new way of putting it. We found them by chance."

"Well, then, I wish we had never moved here. There is a fatality about the house, I am sure! See how much has come to pass since day before yesterday!"

She was going back upon the old subject, and the tears were pouring. I insisted upon her dressing and practising over some new music, while I went out to hunt for a cook to fill Myra's place.

"Can't you coax or hire her to stay until the end of her month, as she first talked of? Oh, she does make such nice apple-pies, I hate to have her go!"

"I have my doubts about her ever having made an apple-pie in my house!"

"Who *has* made them then?"

"I suspect Nursery Brown has been the fairy who has coaxed our appetites to such an extraordinary degree. It is very stupid in me not to know any thing for certain, especially about what is going on under my own roof, but there never was any such house-keeping or cooking before she came, and it has been so agreeable to me since that I have let it take its own course."

"I should give it all up to her and let her engage the new cook, then, if I was you."

"Oh, no! I must preserve my dignity as the head of the family. Besides, I don't pay her any more wages than I should an ordinary nurse-girl, and, for that reason, I couldn't ask her to shoulder any of my responsibilities. What she does of her own accord I appreciate, but I am actually afraid to offer her any compensation for extra favors, lest she take offence and vanish out of my sight."

"She must do things for the very love of doing them, I should say, then," replied Spicy, as she bathed her eyes at the washbasin.

"More likely to occupy her mind. I have known persons busy themselves in ways as uncongenial as possible, in order to dull the sharp edges of some great sorrow, and I am beginning to think such may be the case with her."

"Have you got any room you would like me to sweep and dust?" asked Spicy, turning round suddenly, with her eyes full of soap, "because, since it is my special aversion, it might tend to ameliorate my misery."

I laughed, and stepped out to look over the balusters to see who had just rung the door-bell. It was one of the detectives in pursuit of additional scraps of information. I met him in the parlor, and we talked a few minutes, closing the interview by entering into an agreement to have the house guarded for a night or two.

Then I put on my hat and shawl and gloves, and went to the intelligence office. There were no cooks in; I never went there when there were any in. But

the woman in attendance, Mrs. Bates, promised to send me one before night.

In accordance thereof, there was one reached my door before I did myself, a buxom, rosy-faced, well-dressed-in-pink-muslin Irishwoman of forty or more years. She had a good, but badly-spelled character, written on several separate and distinct slips of paper. She informed me that she had always lived in the *very first families*, and, as for her skill in the art of cookery, she knew how to do every thing "illegant."

"When can you come?"

"I am come now, if you please, ma'am."

"I mean, to stay? Don't you want to go after your clothes?"

"I've got clothes on, ma'am, as is good enough for anybody's house."

"I thought they were too good to do your work in, and presumed you had others?"

"So I has. But I can go for 'em in the evening."

"What is your name?"

"Ann, if you please, ma'am."

"Well, Ann, I hope you are not easily frightened, for we've been having robbers in the house."

"No, not at all, ma'am. They had 'em where I was last."

"They got in through the window in the servants' room, but I have taken measures to have it made as secure as possible since."

"Oh, I don't mind. They have often got into my windows."

"You are probably not afraid of ghosts either?" I thought it best to sound her on every point.

"Not the least of a bit, ma'am."

"And you are quite prepared to go

into the kitchen, and take off your bonnet and help get the dinner?"

"I are."

"Come this way, then."

Myra was on her knees by the kitchen stove, basting some chickens which were sizzling and sputtering in the oven. She rose to her feet, and confronted the new-comer with flashing eyes.

"Here is your successor," I said.

"Take courage, you will not have to sleep in this dreadful house again."

"Seems to me you are in a mighty hurry to get rid of me! I ain't going to be sent off so!"

"You gave me notice that you should leave to-day."

"But you needn't a been so glad like. It's more'n flesh and blood can stand, when I thought so much of the baby, and Miss Spicy, and General Belmore, and have taken such an interest and worked so hard a-movin'!"

"I am sorry, Myra, but you have it as you wished. Please show Ann where the things are, and tell her all about the *hobgoblins*, and then come to my room and get your pay."

Maggie was setting the table in the dining-room. She was quite composed, not having been as terror-stricken at any time as Myra. We learned afterward that she had had much less occasion, for Myra, in trying to find Nursy Brown's door, had run straight into the arms of one of the midnight marauders.

"You will get more than you want of that cook-woman afore you get through with her!" were Myra's last words to me, as she shrugged her shoulders with a dubious insinuation.

That night passed quietly, and each

member of the family rose next morning greatly refreshed. Phil had cracked a good many jokes over the police guard, told me that lightning was never known to strike twice in the same place; but, upon the whole, I think he was glad of the arrangement.

Spicy was late to breakfast, and, when I sent out for an instalment of hot rolls and coffee, I did not get it. Maggie seemed unwilling to tell me why, but I drew it out of her. The cook had put things all away and washed the coffee-pot, and said to Maggie:

"Go 'long, I'm not going to have one meal bothering round until the next one is ready."

We exchanged a few significant glances, and made the best of the situation.

She understood her business, that feminine monster, who had usurped such high-handed rule in my establishment, but we all kept out of her way. The delicious dinners and lunches and breakfasts, and the snowy kitchen, and the shining tin, and the perfect order that reigned supreme, reconciled me to many of her ways; but I was far from being comfortable. Spicy said to Phil:

"Sister Meddie never dares to drink two cups of coffee now, for if she sends for more she is liable to be discharged."

One week, two weeks, and yet no clew to the robbers! I grew more and more philosophic, but Spicy's bursts of grief and self-reproaches were daily food. She was too light-hearted to pine under the pressure of the misfortune, but she could not banish it from her mind. Phil had picked up the ghost story, and thought it a capital joke.

"She'll have to hurry up if she is going to pay me a visit before I go to Detroit," he said, one evening.

"And when may that sad time arrive?" I asked. "We have got so used to you, I don't know how we are going to spare you."

"I shall get off about Tuesday next, Providence permitting."

He had been offered a better position in a Michigan bank, and had accepted.

"We shall miss him; but then we are not as timid as we were, and Leonardus will be home for a few weeks before a great while," I said to Spicy.

"I had just as soon he would go as not. He is only a lay figure anyway. All he does is to laugh at us when there is any real danger. And, to tell the up-and-down truth, I am tired of his perpetual ding-dong about *Spicy's ghost*," she replied.

"What an inconsistent young lady! Not half an hour ago you were begging him to stay."

"Complimentary, purely. One must pamper a man's vanity a little. You know that as well as I, Meddie."

The night after he left, I went to the blue-room to get an extra pillow for Bright. I lighted the gas, drew down the window-shade and gathered up some newspapers which were scattered. One of the arms of my cane-rocker was missing, and I searched for it until it turned up from behind the bureau. Then I discovered the handle gone from my decorated china pitcher, and after much ado all to myself I extracted it from the washstand drawer and stood holding the dismembered part in my hand, full of vexation, though not able to pin the

guilt of the accident to any one in particular, when, suddenly, a gust of damp night air chilled and startled me, and, turning quickly around in the direction of the closet-door, which had silently swung open, I encountered the black, piercing eyes of a tall, sickly-looking, thin-visaged woman, in a singularly-fashioned robe of white, more nearly resembling a counterpane than any thing I can name, and while my heart was struggling for room to turn over in my throat, and my blood was leaping through my veins with telegraphic velocity, she slowly receded from my sight and disappeared altogether!

## CHAPTER VII.

### SPICY'S COURAGE.

"AND you think she was really a live woman, do you?"

It was Spicy who asked that question, and it was I, lying on my bed, who replied, with an effort:

"Certainly."

"Then what did you go and do such an absurdly silly thing as to faint away for?"

"I can't explain. We have had considerable stir and excitement of late, and I suppose I am nervous, like womankind in general."

"What was the color of her hair?"

"Dark, or black. She reminded me of a Southern lady I once knew. I wish I could have had strength and presence of mind enough to have followed her and unravelled the mystery."

Oh, Meddie! I am glad you didn't. She would have beguiled you into some

cranny or other, and that would have been the last of you. I wonder she didn't gobble you up as it was! But, say, did she look unhappy, as if she was tired of roving about between heaven and earth, without any husband or home of her own, and in such queer clothes?"

I smiled.

"She looked very sad and a trifle wild," I replied.

"I see! There is only one way in which I can ever arrive at the minutiae of the case for certain, and that is by interviewing the ghost myself. I believe I will get big Ann to sit up with me some night and watch for her."

I smiled again, and very incredulously.

"You had better."

"Don't be sarcastic, Meddie. Perhaps you think I don't dare? There is one thing about it, the ghost and I would have a great point of attraction, for we should both be afraid of Ann."

"Spicy, you are the oddest bundle of contradictions that it was ever my lot to meet! Would you really and truly and deliberately station yourself in the blue-room, with only Ann to protect you, and await the coming of our queer visitor?"

"I believe I would," and there was meaning in the twinkling of her pretty eye. "May I buy up Ann with a bottle of whiskey?"

"No, that would be hardly safe. But you may promise her an extra five dollars when I pay her month's wages, if you wish."

"You give me full permission to make arrangements, do you?"

"Yes."

I had very little faith in her carrying out the daring project. It was not equal



to the original grain of mustard-seed. I knew how easy it was to plan and talk and get ready, and even fight with an invisible foe, but my late remarkable experience had taught me the fallacy of all self-measurements and human calculations when brought to the unwelcome test. I was anxious to have the problem solved of who or what manner of person or spirit was thus intruding upon the privacy of our little home, and why she came and gazed in upon us, and went away again giving no sign! But I did not esteem Spicy the proper one to fathom the secret, and I did not believe she would make the attempt. She was buzzing about all day, and several times alluded to her night's undertaking; said Ann was willing. She believed Ann was rather predisposed in favor of ghosts. I spoke to Nursy Brown about the freak which Spicy had taken in her head, and asked her if she thought I had better forbid it.

"Oh, no; if no good comes of it, no harm more serious than a scare will be likely to befall her."

In the early part of the evening Spicy told me that she and Ann were going on duty as soon as the yeast came for the breakfast muffins. She had put on a little red jacket, embroidered with black, and her dainty curls, dressed with far more than her usual care, were floating over her neck and shoulders. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes were sparkling with eagerness and expectation. She was more lovely than I had ever seen her before, and I was giving her an affectionate mental embrace when Ann put her head through the door.

"I are ready, miss."

"Have you been in the closet during the day to assure yourself that the window is perfectly secure?" I asked.

"Yes—yes, indeed!" replied Spicy. "Nursy Brown and I have been like two revolving lights ever since early in the morning. There isn't a sign of a place where a body can get in or out. I am going to put a lighted candle in there for the ghost's convenience."

"What shall you do first if you see any one?"

"The dear only knows! But I sha'n't fall down as you did, for one thing. I guess I shall say—'Good-evening, and how are the folks at home?'"

"I shall feel of her, and see what she are made of!" spoke up Ann.

"That is right, and don't fail to find out where she goes, too," I said.

"I sha'n't lit her go at all, onless Miss Spicy tells me to," continued her cookship.

They started on their way, and I heard Spicy saying in the hall:

"Now, Ann, you must not go to sleep. You know it is a part of our contract that I am not to give you a penny if you shut your eyes once, except to wink."

I wished I had been able to have gone with them. I asked Nursy Brown not to go to bed, and to look into the blue-room once in a while.

It was so still in that part of the house as the hours slid away that I concluded they must all be asleep, and, at last, getting more aroused and apprehensive, I got up and stood at my door and listened. Finally, I determined that it would not do me any more harm to go and see, than to fret and worry without

knowing. Nursy Brown was in her rocking-chair reading a new magazine. I passed by and peeped into the blue-room. Ann sat in a chair by the bureau, with her eyes fixed on the closet-door, and Spicy lay on the bed looking at Ann. They both saw me, and Spicy put her finger to her lip to warn me not to speak. She smiled while doing so, but the dimples at the corners of her mouth were expressive of high excitement rather than merriment.

I returned to my bed and it was not long before I slept quietly. How long I am unable to say. I was wakened by a laugh that sounded like a chink of silver dollars. No one who knew my sister Spicy intimately would be at a loss to know from whence it came. I started up, threw a shawl round me, and went to the blue-room. Not a soul was there! Frightened, I stepped along and looked into the closet which was open! There stood Spicy quite alone intent on the examination of an old daguerreotype by the dim light of the candle. It was not in a case, and upon the back of it was pasted an autograph. She looked from the picture to the name, then to the picture again, revolving the two back and forth before her eyes, entirely oblivious to my presence until I spoke to her. And even then she could not seem to disengage her thoughts sufficiently to reply.

"What is it?" I asked, the second and finally the third time.

"It is —"

But she got no farther, and still seemed to be lost in astonishment, or in some great absorbing study.

"Let me see."

And I stepped down beside her.

"Ah! a young man! rather good-looking, too! Nose decidedly Roman. Standing collar. Hair parted in the middle."

She turned it over and I read the name.

"FRED GILDEBSLEEVE!"

"Where did it come from?"

"It was on the floor just where I stand! I hit my foot against it and stooped and picked it up!"

"And you had been in before, and it was not there then?"

"No. The floor was clean as Ann's kitchen table."

We went back into the blue-room, and under the gas, with our heads rubbing against each other, gazed into the honest, pleasing face that was returning the compliment with spirit.

"How happened you to go in the closet?"

"Oh, I must tell you all about it. You see Ann was so prodigiously courageous that I didn't have much faith in her. It was getting so late that I had made up my mind we should have no adventures to entertain you with in the morning, and I thought I would have a little fun all to myself, trying to see how much the old cook would bear. So I pretended I heard footsteps going up and down in the closet. She looked wild, and opened her mouth and eyes. Then I whispered and asked her to open the closet-door and let the poor ghost in, so that we could get through and go to bed! You ought to have seen her teeth chatter! And such an awful look as she gave me! And then she got pale, and her eyes bunged out, and the big flat bow she wears on the thin spot (top of her

head) fell off, and she stretched out her hands as if she was going to swim, and began: 'Oh, fauther, and hauly mother and the blessed virgin, presarve us!' and it was so comical to me, for I hadn't heard any noise in the closet, and then she stammered, and choked, and gurgled, and cried 'go-go-go-go-away;' and I was so intent upon seeing the end of her *conniption*, or whatever it was, that it never for a moment occurred to me that there was any thing else to look at, until she ran from the room, and I laughed! Then I moved my head, and lo! the strange woman, or ghost, which you and Nursy Brown have described, was standing in the closet-door! I sprang from the bed and put my foot through my hoop, and tripped, and floundered, and was so long in recovering my balance that I failed to see her ladyship home. When I got to the closet there was no one there, and nothing to be found but this picture? Meddie, do you believe in witches?"

"No. I have not much belief in any thing just now, and what I have is unsettled. Were you not frightened at all? You seem to have deported yourself with great coolness!"

"Oh, as for that, I felt a little squeamish in the beginning, but it is not half as bad to face a danger on your own responsibility as it is to be pitched into it by somebody else. It is like my fidgeting everybody, and the driver in particular, when I ride after a frisky horse. But out at Aunt Minerva's, last summer, I not only drove her runaway Dick to all points of the compass, but I often actually harnessed the old, cross, biting beast. Last week, one day, I was riding in the

omnibus on the west side, and almost got the *highatrikes* because the horses kicked up. So you see it would not be safe to count on my valor. It comes and goes. As for the ghost, I was disappointed. She did not come up to my mark at all. She wasn't dressed pretty, had no white sheet about her; her garb was plain black! If my eyes served me right, the bottom of her dress was all mud. I do wish she had not been in such a hurry."

"Did she make no noise whatever in her exit?"

"Not that I can complain of. I made some, though. I spilt Phil's cologne bottle on the table and smashed it. I have not looked after the pieces yet, but I guess they will keep."

"Let us go and examine the window once more, Spicy."

"What, the one in the closet? agreed," and away she tripped.

It was fast. Our combined force could not shake it. The mystery deepened, and could not be explained away by any possibility. And the picture, springing upon us in such a singular manner, added to our mystification. True, it might have been among the rubbish in connection with the old letters, but not very probable, because, if so, why did we not find it before? or how could it have moved itself into the place where it was discovered?

"It makes me think of my dream," said Spicy.

"I wish you would step and ask Nursy Brown for a shawl, I am getting chilly," I said.

Spicy obeyed, but was back presently.

"Where can she be? She is not in her room!"

"Not in her room! The baby's there?"

"Oh, yes, as sweet as a dumpling."

"Then she can't be far off. Look in the bath-room."

It was at the end of the hall close by where we were standing. Spicy pushed open the door, and, instead of Nursy Brown, there was Ann, counting her beads!

"You are a great one! Who did you leave to take care of me, I should like to know? Do you call that pluck? I never shall put you on guard again!" exclaimed Spicy.

Ann slowly arose from her knees.

"So you are not much of a soldier, after all? Tell me what you saw." I addressed her from the door of the blue-room.

"I know it was onkind to desart Miss Spicy, but I daren't do no other way, cause my old misthress, who's dead this many a year, was right there afore me, and shure it was me she was afthur."

"How did she look?"

"Very quare in the eye, marm. Discontented like, as if she was a mite lonesome, and wanted her owld faithful Ann to fix her broth, and make her tay for her."

Spicy giggled, and then, trying to control herself with a sort of nervous desperation, burst into tears.

"What are you crying for?" I asked, smiling.

"Because my grandmother is dead;" and then she giggled again, until I thought she was going to strangle.

The north hall-door opened and shut just then, and while I strained my ears in breathless anxiety for what was to

follow, Nursy Brown ran up the stairs. She was panting and more excited than usual for her, but when Spicy questioned eagerly as to what was the matter, and where she had been, she only answered:

"Nothing is the matter, dear; and I've been under the barberry-bush, to try to settle the point in my mind whether any one climbed up or down the grape-arbor near the closet window."

"And did you see any one?"

"No, dear."

"You know the ghost has paid me a visit? Ann and I both saw her!"

"I presumed so, and that was why I alipped out as soon as I heard the stir in the blue-room. But I am back no wiser than I went."

"We may as well lock up the room and go to bed," I said, beginning to feel the effect of my unseasonable exertions.

"And you want no more of me, do you?" asked Ann, in a hollow voice.

"Yes; we want you to pray till morning, to keep us clear of purgatory," said Spicy, with a sober face. "If you are afraid to go down to your room alone I will go with you, and count sled-stakes as I go."

"Hush!" I said, grasping her arm.

I was afraid Ann might take exceptions to being ridiculed, but she did not seem to mind it. She looked as if she thought Spicy was going to carry out her proposition, and I think she would have very much liked to have had her done so.

I shook my head, and she departed. Nursy Brown put out the candle and the gas, and locked the blue-room door, and Spicy staid in my room to give me my medicine at four o'clock.

I don't know how many times she looked at that picture of Fred Gilder-sleeve before she got quiet! Once she kissed it. She put it under her pillow, took it out again and laid it in a chair, removed it over to the table, carried it to the bureau, brought it back to the bed, and changed it no less than a dozen times from the pillow to the chair and back again. I did not esteem it worth while to talk any more, for the night was far spent, and we both slept at last.

I had a carpenter come the next day and put a lock on the closet-door. Nursy Brown advised me to keep the blue-room under lock and key also. It was not pleasant to feel that a portion of one's house was uninhabitable, but I resolved upon that course until such time as we should be able to decide what sort of a being was entailed upon our hospitality.

Leonardus arrived, shoulder-straps and all, on the first day of July. He had got leave of absence for a month, and brought gladness to our hearts. We had so much to tell him, and we talked so fast and so constantly, that I began to fear that he never would remember the half we were saying, and had already proposed a little music by way of giving him a rest, when Spicy began about her ghost, and told the story in such a diverting style that he laughed heartily.

"Four of you all saw the same thing, did you? Well, that sounds like evidence. No getting over that."

But the robbery did not strike him in so pleasant a vein. His brow clouded, and he asked a great many questions. I saw Spicy's lip quivering, and the sparkle in her eyes getting dimmed from an ap-

proaching shower, and hastily turned the subject. There was such an excellent opportunity to do so just then, too, for Nursy Brown was coming up the walk with Bright, and his father had not seen him yet.

How my heart beat as he caught him up, and tossed him in the air, and held him at arms' length, and looked at him! Bright was afraid. He was not used to gentlemen. A soldier in full uniform he had never seen except on the street. He did not appreciate the familiar hugs and kisses of the great bronzed fellow who shook him round. He made up a lip more remarkable for every thing else than beauty, and stretched his chubby arms toward Nursy Brown, who stood waiting in the entry, and then he screamed with a volume of sound that caused Leonardus to pass him over with the remark:

"You will make a good general, my boy."

We heard him cry for some time after he reached the nursery. Leonardus sitting on the piano-stool, with his hands in his pockets, was looking at the carpet.

"I was trying to think, Meddie, where I had seen those eyes before," he said, at length, with a perplexed air.

"What eyes, or whose eyes? excuse my grammar."

"Bright's nurse's, or whatever you call the person who took him from me."

"I don't know, I am sure."

"Neither do I. I will tell you who she reminds me of. You have heard me speak of Lewis Vance, my old chum at Harvard, who is now Brigadier-General Vance of the army of the Potomac? Well, it is his wife. I was at their house

in Boston, after my return from California. He married Judge Shubill's niece of Detroit, one of the most beautiful girls on this continent."

"In what respect does Nursy Brown look like her?"

"I really cannot say. It is her eyes, I reckon. There is something very peculiar about them. Don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do," chimed in Spicy.

"And, by the way, there is a sad bit of history connected with that unfortunate pair. I met poor Vance when I went to Washington with those dispatches, and, one night, by the flickering light of his camp-fire, he unburdened his heart to me. He married his wife abroad, and I never knew the circumstances before. She was travelling with her brother, her only near relative, and in Florence they fell in company with Lewis Vance. He and young Everett had known each other in Buffalo, where the latter was doing a thriving mercantile business."

"What was the sister's name?" asked Spicy and I, both in the same breath.

"Ida—Ida Everett. Why do you stare so?"

"Never mind, go on," I said, as calmly as possible, although my heart was getting up a great tattoo at the prospect of learning something of Ida Everett's fortunes.

"Well, as I was saying, the gentlemen knew each other, and Vance fell in love with the lady. He offered himself in his abrupt and impetuous manner, and was very kindly and firmly refused. Still he hovered about, determined to win her, and saw her daily. His love increased until it became an infatuation. The

brother fell sick, and his life was in great danger, so that it became necessary to remove him to a small German town where the air was dry and pure. Vance accompanied them, and devoted himself with loving assiduity to the task of nursing his friend, and keeping up the spirits of the anxious sister. Everett lingered for many weeks, and then died with only the two watchers to follow him to the tomb. In the earliest part of his sickness Ida had written to her uncle, but the letter, like many another that followed it, never went farther than Lewis Vance's pocket. Now, while she was counting the days which must elapse before her good guardian could reach her, the villain knew that he had her in his power and bided his time.

"Full of sorrow for her loved and lost brother, and despairing lest she should be left in a foreign land, not only devoid of funds wherewith to accomplish her homeward trip, but dependent upon her own very limited travelling experience, she listened with more lenity to the protestations of her lover, and when he vowed that he would not leave her, whether she married him or not, and on his bended knees begged her to save him from self-destruction by becoming his wife, she at last consented, reluctantly, he well knew, for she was frank enough to tell him, on more than one occasion, that she loved another, and where it was not returned.

"The wedding must have been a sad one. Vance, whose habits were none of the best, and who had been so long under self-imposed restraint in order to obtain his wife, fell headlong into dissipation. In Paris he launched out into the

most unbounded extravagance. Arrived in Boston, he bought a Beacon-Street mansion, filled it with costly trappings, supplied his wife with silks and satins and jewelry, which she would never wear, and abused and adored her according to his moods. He was a man of most ungovernable passions, and, with the tears of contrition streaming down his weather-beaten face, he told me how he had often struck her in his fits of madness, for no other reason than because she looked so sweet and suffering. He wanted to teach her to have spunk enough to strike back. But he never did. He had the misfortune to have a fortune left him and was on the straight road through it, although it happened to be so large that he had time to cause a great deal of misery before he got to the end of the route.

"One strange freak which he carried through with a high hand was, not to allow his wife to visit her uncle, and, when that dear old gentleman came to Boston, he managed to make his stay so uncomfortable, that neither Ida nor the judge cared to have it prolonged. About two years after they were married she announced her intention of going to Detroit for an absence of two weeks. He raved. But she was decided for once. Seeing himself powerless to prevent her from going, he swore she should leave her baby at home, a little fellow not quite as old as our Bright, and carried his point with threats.

"Her uncle returned with her at the time appointed, but did not go to her house. He had business in Providence and New Haven, and went on immediately. Vance met her, half-drunk as

usual, and told her she should pay for her ridiculous wilfulness in going to Detroit against his wishes. She greeted him pleasantly, and ran up-stairs to her baby. The nursery was vacant. She hurried from room to room, and lastly to the kitchen, to inquire for the little one. The cook told her that the nurse had taken him out for a walk. So she took off her things and watched from the window tearfully and impatiently for his return. Vance saw her distress, and acted upon it. He says an army of devils must have taken possession of him. He went to the door, and when the girl brought the child up the steps he took it from her and dismissed her. Knowing his peculiarities, she was too much frightened to say any thing and went round to the kitchen. He took the child to its mother, and, just as she was about to receive it from his arms with an expression of supreme delight on her face, he lifted it high in the air, and let it fall from the dizzy distance to the floor. The little creature never breathed afterward.

"He was sobered before the funeral, but his wife refused to see him. He wondered why there had been no more fuss and excitement! He had expected both. He did not exactly care to be arrested for murder, but he meant to show that little saint of a woman who was master in his house. Didn't care much if the brat was gone, if folks would take it peaceably. Ida had always loved it a d——n sight better than she had him. But he don't think he meant to kill it. Was so far gone the night afterward that he did not know he had.

"He sat by the side of his wife while the minister read the burial-service over

the little casket which contained their all. He rode by her side in the carriage to Mt. Auburn cemetery. He stood by her side while a little mound was raised. He did all that was respectable and proper. But he never once got a glimpse of her face from behind the wall of crape which enshrouded her, nor did they exchange a word during the whole time. He was extremely depressed, from the want of his accustomed stimulant, and left the carriage before arriving at his own door, to step into a saloon. He went home about midnight, and found on his table a little note of farewell. His wife had left him forever. It ran thus:

"LEWIS: You have no accuser. Fear not. I sent for our physician and told him I had dropped my baby. He could not bring the darling back to life. Its death is supposed to be the result of a mother's carelessness.

"Seek me not, for you will never find me. I do not go to my uncle, nor to any one who ever knew me. Nor shall I ever present any claims for one penny of your property, nor for what was once mine, but is now in your hands. IDA."

"If you could have seen that stout man weep in his bitterness of spirit when he showed me that worn note, your heart would have bled for him, richly as he deserved his punishment. He swears that from that hour until the present time he has not tasted a glass of liquor. That until the breaking out of the Rebellion he has never ceased his unavailing search for his loved and lost. He has travelled through the country on foot to ferret out, if possible, her refuge in some by-place, has walked up and down the streets of large cities, gazing

into every face that he passed; has journeyed from point to point, from horizon to horizon—the one great purpose of his life to find and humble himself before her whom he had so terribly and so cruelly wronged, and crave forgiveness for the past, even if the future must be a stinging blank."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### REMORSE AND RETRIBUTION.

"How it does soften one toward a wicked man to have him repentant!" said Spicy, with a little gulp. "I would never want to see him, though, if I were she."

"She must have understood him well to provide against such a possible contingency," continued Leonardus. "He has never so much as obtained the slightest trace of her. And she cut herself equally adrift from all her friends. Not one of them can tell whether she be living or dead. Judge Shubill has gone down in sorrow to his grave. He was a bachelor, some web of romance woven into his history, I believe. I have some idea that I have been told that it was Ida's mother whom he loved in his youth, but I am not sure. At any rate he adopted the little orphan, and educated her, and very nearly idolized her. Now he has left the whole bulk of his property, real and personal, in trust for her, should she ever come forward to receive it. He gave her \$50,000 as a bridal present, and that, I suppose, was what she referred to in her note. Vance says he has deposited it, subject to her order, and so settled his own affairs that heirs-



at-law cannot put in their hearing unless his wife's decease is properly authenticated. He hopes to fall in battle, and courts the positions of greatest danger. His reputation for daring and intrepidity is unequalled in that division of the army. Life is an intolerable burden to him, and remorse is sapping the very foundations of his existence.

"I took out that little picture of Bright which you sent me, Meddie, as I have had a fashion of doing at any time, and under any circumstances, and was intently regarding it, when all at once he leaned forward and looked over my shoulder:

"'Good God! Belmore, how did you come by that?'

"His face looked like a dying man's. I explained, and after a few minutes he gasped:

"'Pardon me; it is so like my boy that I thought you were displaying it to taunt me! O Belmore, my punishment is greater than I can bear.'"

We were interrupted by a summons to dinner, and conversation turned upon the thousand and one topics so interesting to the heads of families, and so uninteresting to the world in general. Spicy tried to tell Leonardus about the old letters, and their connection with Ida Everett, but I had Bright in my arms, and was trying to teach him to say Papa, and he would persist in getting it "Pay, pay," and the brigadier couldn't listen to any thing else just then. Afterward one of his favorite rice-puddings came on the table, and he took the youngster himself to try to make him say Plum; but, with the obstinacy natural to children, the little mischief

screwed up his face and kept saying "Berwy, berwy," leaving his mouth wide open to have one put in occasionally.

In the evening we went out to walk, and the next day Leonardus had business with the commandant of the post at Camp Douglas, and did not get home until four o'clock P. M.

"Now, Spicy, what about those love-epistles?" he asked, as he stretched himself upon the lounge in the library.

She ran and got them, told him some, and read other portions to him. He was greatly interested.

"How happened it, Meddie, that you never took the trouble to find out who lived in this house before you?" he asked.

"I did. It is the old Dwight Mansion, you know. They, or some of the members of the Dwight family, have occupied it from the time it was built until about a year ago. Then it was rented to a family by the name of Thomas. No one seems to know much about them, except that they paid their rent and let the place go to the dogs. If window-shutters flopped, they let them flop; if water-pipes burst, they let them burst; if rats chose to play on the front-stairs, they let them play there; in short, as children used to say when I was among their happy number:

'They did as they do in Spain:  
When it rained, they let it rain.'

Where they went, when they left here, no one seems to know, any more than where they came from. They had boarders, as near as we can ascertain. But there is not much prospect of learning more."

"I see. And any discoveries in re-

gard to the Gildersleeves wouldn't help us, or Ida Everett either."

"Poor thing! How she must have suffered!" said Spicy. "Now, wouldn't it be the strangest thing of all," and she lowered her voice to a half-whisper, "if our Nursy Brown were that very individual!"

"I don't think so," Leonardus replied, promptly and decidedly. "I must say I did have a suspicion of the kind the first day I arrived. The deep, rich blue of her eye, with such a depth of soul in back of it, brought Mrs. Vance vividly to my mind. But I have observed this person more closely since, and I am certain that one so highly bred and nurtured and cultivated, and who at the last was drowned in such an ocean of trouble as Ida Everett, could never have fitted herself to the position which Nursy Brown holds, and with such a measure of serene content. Ida Everett, with all her other gifts and graces, was a brilliant writer, and won distinction under a *nom de plume*, even before her marriage. She would have been much more likely to have resorted to literature for a livelihood, if she took no money with her, as Vance fully supposes."

So it seemed to me. How the stronger always influence the weaker! Ten minutes before, I was morally confident that Nursy Brown was the heroine of my tale. I had sketched it on my brain, accounted for her passionate devotion to my baby by its resemblance to her own, divined the greatness of her character by the marvellous aptitude with which she engrossed herself in little things, and was trying to shape my figures of speech when I should, some day, approach her on the delicate and distressing subject.

One argument from Leonardus, and I was all afloat again.

"I have to go to Buffalo on the 5th. Now, wifey, if you will tie up a few things in a pillow-case and keep me company, we will stop a day or two in Cleveland, and visit the Burgoynes."

"I shall be delighted to do so, I know of nothing to prevent," was my quick response.

Although I did not say so, I had a few preparations to make for my journey. The buttons were not on my new travelling-dress nor the sleeves sewed in. My brown silk was too long. I had had in contemplation the taking off the skirt from the waist and the shortening of it, and I must do that, surely, for it was my only dress-dress. My hat must be newly trimmed too, and I must go down-town for gloves and sundry other articles. So that, with my plotting and planning, I buried Ida Everett and all her possible connections.

Leonardus, like many another man whom I have known, never was willing his wife should do any thing when he was present. Her whole attention must be devoted to him. I was glad enough to humor him in it generally, but when one is going somewhere and chooses to look her feminine best, why, it is inconvenient, to say the least. However, he had some running about the city to do himself, looking after soldiers' families, he said, and with Nursy Brown and Spicy both to assist me, I was nearly ready, when Ann came lumbering up to my room where I was sorting out my collars and cuffs and neck-ribbons.

"I should like to be gettin' my money if you please, ma'am."

"Yes, Ann, I will give it to you this evening. Do you want it all?"

"I does. I am going to take a little picnic to-morrow."

"Oh, I cannot spare you. I have invited some friends to dine."

"I gets no dinner for nobody on the Fourth of July. I always has that to myself. We folks that steam over the hot stoves must get a little change sometimes."

"But you know my husband, whom I have not seen for more than a year, is here, and I want to make every thing as pleasant for him as possible. I will give you a day next week. Won't that answer just as well?"

"No, ma'am." Most emphatically spoken. "I hasn't seen my man for twice that time, but I has got to have a little pleasure myself for all that. I sha'n't do no work in this house to-morrow."

"What! not get my breakfast in the morning?"

"Sure and I sha'n't! The picnic goes at six o'clock."

At any other time I should have said, "Very well, you need not trouble yourself to come back;" but I thought of my trip with Leonardus on the day following the Fourth, and swallowed my annoyance. She was off according to her programme, before we had got two-thirds of the way to finally in our dreams. We worried through the day as best we could. Nursy Brown cooked, and I was baby-tender; Maggie washed dishes, and Spicy swept carpets; and Leonardus divided his time between entertaining our guests, and throwing open the doors and letting the flies in as fast as I could get them

out, and firing-off crackers and torpedoes for Bright's edification. In the evening we had a private display of pin-wheels and Roman candles, and thus ended the most doleful day of the season. Bright was cross and wouldn't go to sleep, nor would he allow the rest of us any indulgence of the kind. At a quarter-past twelve Ann had not arrived.

Our train left the Southern Michigan depot at six in the morning. What was to be done? I could not leave such a burden on the shoulders of Nursy Brown—it was enough for her to take care of Bright. Ann might not return at all; Maggie was not strong, the weather was oppressively hot, and she knew nothing about cooking in any event. It was inevitable, I must stay at home. Leonardus and I were both disappointed.

"Then I think I will not stop in Cleveland—I will go the other route through Detroit," he said.

"Why not stop over one night with Cousin Phil?"

"I believe I will. I would like to know how the boy is getting on."

"Be careful! Don't call him a boy. He would think you meant to insult him."

Leonardus laughed. "Have you the number of his boarding-house?"

"He boards with his sister, Mrs. Lawrence. I have her address on a card. Here it is," and I put the little guide-board in his vest-pocket.

"I will get my breakfast at the Briggs House; don't try to wake when I go," and my good-night was my good-by for many days.

We had no Ann the next day, and,

although I had never had a better cook, I felt that her course was run in my establishment. I made another tour through the intelligence-offices, which resulted in the employment of a pretty, cross-eyed little German girl, and I introduced her with all necessary pomp and circumstance into the clean, well-kept kitchen of the recreant Ann. She proved to be a jewel in her way. Had been assistant-cook in a hotel, was amiable as well as efficient, and quite consoled me for the loss I had sustained. Her Annahip did not make her appearance for thirteen days, when she walked in one morning fresh and blooming, her muslin dress as pink and starchy as ever, and, with the blandest of smiles, asked me if I was pretty well.

Yes, I was, and I hoped she was in the enjoyment of the same blessing. It was on a Monday, and I was in the laundry, telling Louisa how to wash some point-lace. She beckoned me aside (Ann, not Louisa), and asked me who that little *snip* was, who was switching round at such a rate.

"It is my new cook, Louisa."

"But she can't do your work!"

"She pleases me very well, so far."

"Oh, she never'll suit you in the world. Nobody but I can do that. I understand all your ways and tastes, and I makes every thing illigant, and I washes like new. Send her agoin'. I am come back, you see."

"How came you to leave me as you did, Ann?"

"Well, I'll just tell you all about it. That picnic went, you know, down to Cottage Grove, and it got through along in the afternoon, and I started for home.

I hadn't had any thing to eat but some cake I carried with me, and nothing to drink but jest one leetle glass of beer, which I took with a friend, because I never drink or any thing of that kind, I am too principled, and as I was a-sayin', I was a-comin' home in the State-Street cars, and I saw another car agoin' down toward the grove again, and I jest happened to think I had disremembered my parasol, and so I got out of one car and got into the other car; and then I was kinder sociable like with some of the gentlemen and ladies who seemed to think I didn't understand my business; and the conductor sasssed me, and all I did was to slap him in the face, and the great, mean Irish pumpkin went and stopped the car and called the perlise, and had me jest dragged to the station-house. Then they locked me up and fined me six dollars! I hadn't got nothing to pay it, cause my pus had been stolen at the picnic, but I told them that, if Mrs. General Belmore only knew about it, she would send me the six dollars mighty quick—"

I interrupted her: "Oh! I hope you did not tell them you were my servant! How disgraceful!"

"Why, bless your dear heart, I had not done any thing. They had only got it all up agin me. They wouldn't come up and tell you and get the money, so I had to go to the Bridewell and work it out. But I didn't associate among the low folks at all! Oh, no! There was jest a few of us, aristocratic ones, who knit and sewed, and made the rest of them wait on us, and had a pretty good time together."

"I can't take you back, Ann. You

must provide yourself with another place."

"Why not? I am an illigant cook, as you know yourself, and I niver drinks nor does any thing wrong!"

There was something extremely ludicrous in the effrontery with which she looked full into my face and made that assertion. I smiled in spite of myself.

"But you have been in Bridewell. I would not like to have a jail-bird in my kitchen!"

"That's jest nothin' at all, only the way folks looks at it. I's been there lots of times, and cooked jest as good whin I came out. I had been there more'n five weeks when I engaged with you first, and this is no wosser than that."

I almost shuddered! How little we know sometimes what sort of people we harbor! It is needless to add that I declined the overtures of my ex-cook, and thanked my stars that I had found her out with no more serious consequences. I also had occasion to rejoice over the thwarting of my travelling projects, as you will learn presently. Leonardus stopped in Detroit and hunted up Phil; that is, he found Phil's sister and spent the night. Phil was at a concert and did not return until very late, and Leonardus finally decided to stay over till evening and take the night train for Buffalo. The two rambled about the city that day; and, finally, Phil persuaded Leonardus to step into a gallery and have his picture taken. While waiting for the operator, they examined the specimens of his art which were lying on the counters and hanging on the walls. Leonardus picked up the card photograph

of a negro, and was laughing at his display of finery—a ruffled shirt-front, fringed neck-tie, watch-chain, and finger-rings. Presently his countenance changed, and he stepped along to a stronger light.

"Look here, Phil! What do you make of this?"

Their eyes were both riveted upon a peculiar charm suspended to the chain.

"It is a greyhound," said Phil.

"So I say. And the fac-simile of the one, if not the very same charm, which I gave to Meddie on our wedding-day. Perhaps we've got hold of the thread, which, by winding up carefully, will lead to the detection of the robbers."

They instituted inquiries. The artist knew something of the whereabouts of his African highness—the detectives found out the rest; and when Leonardus stopped again in Detroit, on his return from Buffalo, he had the satisfaction of identifying my stolen property.

As was subsequently shown, the old Irishman who moved us, and who spotted the goods, entered into a partnership with the negro to accomplish the business. The negro was an expert and did the work, and they divided the proceeds. They had considerable difference of opinion about who should come in for the watch and its accompaniments, for the man of color said:

"You can't neber sell no such thing widout the detectables bein' after you and disconveniencin' you."

But it was finally settled as above. They had disposed of the buttons and the garnet set, but they had given them much trouble and been an unprofitable

investment. My solitaire diamond, Cuffy said he would put away for his Nancy, as it was of no account much. The pearls had fallen to Patrick's share, and he had given them to his old woman. He didn't know where she was, but his memory was stirred up, and, after tedious researches, Leonardus confronted my remarkable Ann in a neighbor's kitchen.

"And is Patrick O'Daly your husband?"

"Well, he married me onst, but he niver's took no care of me nor nothin' like that."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No. Nor it don't make any matter."

"He has sent me to you to get a pin and a pair of ear-rings, which he says he gave you for a present some time in June, while you were living with Mrs. Belmore."

"Humph! Presint, was it? He tould me to tuck 'em away in my trunk o' things, which stands in your wood-shed! That's all I know about it."

"Step round with me, if you please, and get them. They belong to my wife."

She looked rather defiant, but an individual with a star on his breast was more potent in his persuasions than Leonardus knew how to be, and the pearls came forth as good as new. And a set of my best towels, and six pairs of linen pillow-cases, and Bright's silver mug, and five forks also, by order of the subscriber!

I could hardly believe my own eyes! And that they should have been under my own roof all the time, even if it was the wood-shed roof. Louisa had once or twice asked me why Ann did not take

that old trunk of hers away. I supposed she had no place to take it to, and I supposed correctly. But I little dreamed what it contained.

Ann walked in as self-possessed as if nothing had happened:

"I are jest agoin' to lave the place I've got. They don't have no order there, nor no system, nor nothin'. They keeps the tay and the shuger locked up, and dales out things to me, and meddles with my closets. You know I can cook illigant. I jest snit you. I am ready to come now. You is a lady and keeps good society, and never fusses with your help."

She threw a smirk into my face, which did not take effect. I had the hardness of heart to refuse to take her into my service, and, what was more, I stood coolly by and saw her led away toward the place prepared for all Chicagoans who do not walk in the paths of honesty, though where but few enter.

She was acquitted when the trial came off, owing to the absence of proof in regard to her complicity in the robbery. But Patrick and Cuffy were doomed to steady labor for the period of five years.

Long before Leonardus turned his face warward, our house became the busy field for dress-makers' operations. Spicy was going to New York in September, to finish her education at Miss Gilbert's school on Fifth Avenue. I was to be her escort to the great city, and there was work to be done for me also.

To keep the coast clear within criticising distance of our army officer, I threw open the blue-room and all the cutting and fitting were done there. Then,

as we were crowded for room to spread new goods without rumpling, I opened the ghost-closet, laid sheets on the floor, and made it a regular store-room.

"I expect we shall tempt the inhabitants of this realm until we get up another scene in the drama," said Spicy, as on her knees she straightened out the folds of a new dress, and left it lying at full length near the window.

How often a word spoken in jest proves, alas, too true!

## CHAPTER IX.

### MISS TERRAPIN.

LEONARDUS had been gone three weeks. We were so crowded with work that I had no time to mope and be lonely. I was bending all my energies to get ready to leave for the East by the 10th of September, in order to make a brief visit in Albany before dropping Spicy at her school. The time was so close at hand that we needed more assistance, and Spicy took it upon herself to find another dress-maker. In a third-floor on Lake Street she was rewarded by success. She found Miss Terrapin.

I had heard of the lady before, for, whatever her business, she was undoubtedly a lady. My Aunt Hatty, Cousin Phil's mother, knew her when a child in the little town of Gothland, near Northampton, in Massachusetts. They were brought up together, that is, they both attended Sunday services in the Congregational meeting-house in the centre, and while Aunt Hatty sat in the square pew at the right of the pulpit, between her father and mother, and dared not so much as raise her hand to

brush a fly from her face for fear of the *tithing*-man, Clara Terrapin sang in the choir. She was the daughter of the squire, and the house they lived in had two chimneys, and her brothers wore gloves to church.

A dozen years later, when progress had left its mark even in that isolated locality in the shape of a new church and a town-hall, and Aunt Hatty had gone back there on a visit with her father (they lived in Hartford then), she learned, among other interesting items, that Clara Terrapin was at the South, teaching. The townspeople esteemed it a distinguished honor to be able to report so favorably of one of their number, and the young and ambitious were studying how they might emulate her example.

She must have conceived the unpopular notion that God never put her into this world simply to take music-lessons, flirt, and get married, for she had gone on through life cultivating her talents, inventing ways of usefulness, crowding efforts into untried spots, failing, trying again, learning, unlearning, and relearning, until she had reached her present standard in the high building where Spicy found her.

At one time she had a snug little property, which had been bequeathed her by a deceased relative. It was a source of perpetual peace of mind. Money is so very convenient! And then it is not always esteemed eminently respectable to be destitute. She had heard it said:

"Want sense, the world will o'erlook it;  
Want feeling, it will find some excuse;  
But, if the world knows you want money,  
You are certain to get its abuse."

And she was beginning to practice on the principle—

"The wisest advice in creation  
Is, ne'er on its kindness to call;  
If ever you want its assistance,  
Just show you don't need it at all."

People went so far at that time as to comment upon the singularity of her tastes in remaining Miss Terrapin! One widower and three old bachelors declared that women were created to be taken care of by men, without regard to circumstances! They were never known to advocate such heresy after one bright morning, when, through the failure of a certain bank, the maiden's dependence passed away like a shadow!

She took the measure of herself at once, and demonstrated to the world that misfortunes could be healthfully borne. Yes, she would battle for her living, while hands and heart were left. She could not open a school with advantage, for she was behind the times in youthful lore. Literature was not in her line. So she rented a doctor and his wife with the house they lived in, and commenced the business of feeding and sleeping people at so much per head.

For a time all went well. Her principal boarder was an eye-and-ear doctor, and forty. He had a broad, expansive forehead, a soft blue eye, a large, domineering nose, an uncertain mouth, long, curly, brown hair, and heavy mustache and whiskers. He was neither too tall nor too short, but of medium stature, and thick-set. He was vastly agreeable, vastly restless, and everywhere present. By virtue of having been rented with the house, he felt called upon to look after its interests in a supervisory manner. He made semi-hourly excursions to the

closets, pantries, drawers, and other private places, to say nothing of all the way-stations between the garret and the cellar. He stopped up rat-holes, tended the furnace, lectured the servants, and made himself useful generally. Indeed, he was just one of those sort of men who might have danced a German upon the point of a cambric-needle, and had room enough left for an audience.

It was such a comfort to have him round, so thought Miss Terrapin in her blissful inexperience. It was the servants who made wry faces when his orders multiplied, and obedience became impracticable. Then he bought them up with little presents of wax-flowers, which did not cost him any thing, and his wife donated a few high-colored ribbons from her upper bureau-drawer.

He was the family carver by his own appointment. It was so very kind of him! His dexterity in securing the tenderloin of the steak to himself was admirable to behold! It inclined Miss Terrapin's argus-eyed boarders to sue for a life-lease of their apartments. He always got hungry in the middle of the day. It was so pleasant for Miss Terrapin to have a man's head at the helm. He could instruct her how to provide for the lunches, else she might have fallen into the popular delusion of putting such dishes on her table as she could afford. The bill of fare, according to Dr. Meddlesome, was cold meat, hot meat-stews, hash, oysters, potatoes, hominy, boiled rice, bread-and-butter, gingerbread, pie, horseradish, mustard, molasses, and something sour—either pickles or cold cabbage; did not object to a lemon. After that he could manage to exist until



dinner-time, if it was on the table promptly at six o'clock. If, by any chance, there was a delay of five minutes, as there would be when he called the cook away from taking up the vegetables to hold a candle for him to fix the cellar-door knob, or the waitress from setting the table to sweep off the front steps, he was at the head of the stairs calling down to say he was in a hurry.

Miss Terrapin had a very uncomfortable way of serving her dinner in courses. She was unkind enough to omit the salad until after the soup. Dr. Meddlesome expostulated with her, and was confounded when she asserted her own supremacy, and declined to make any changes in that particular. It was clearly a declaration of war. He was not fond of strong-minded women, and he took immediate steps to hint on the sly his dissatisfaction to the rest of the boarders. Nothing was right any more. The coffee and plates were both cold in the morning. It might have been because he read Miss Terrapin's paper for ten minutes or so after sitting down to the table. It saved his taking one himself. She ventured to hint the same to him, and he took mortal offence, but never a newspaper. Boarders left, without giving notice or reasons. She filled their places as soon as possible, but not always without pecuniary loss and subsequent embarrassment. She felt as if she were riding round all the sharp corners of life in a hearse. Finally, her servants began to leave her in the most extraordinary manner! She suspected the cause when she saw Dr. Meddlesome dodging about in the lower regions, but she could not

fight him without understanding his secret machinery. A mysterious silence hung about her kitchen. She hired new servants, but as soon as she turned her back they departed. The breakfasts and the dinners and the lunches were no longer properly cooked, for the lady of the house could not stand over the range herself, and be wandering up and down the highways and the by-ways at the same time looking for servants.

Dr. Meddlesome became melancholy. He told his friends that he had got some one to keep his house who was not capable. Mrs. Meddlesome thought it unwise for a single woman to undertake such a burden as a boarding-house. Miss Terrapin bought a lot at Rose Hill, and contemplated her future home there with pleasure. She concluded she must have mistaken her calling in life. She struck a balance, finally, and, finding that she was on the wrong side of her accounts altogether, took the straight and narrow road to another field of labor.

Music had been her forte in her youth. Music-teachers lived, moved, and had their being, and why not she? She took a hall bedroom in the fourth story of a friend's house till she could get a class formed. Then she started on her weary pilgrimage. Wherever a child was rolling hoop she turned her footsteps. At door after door she inquired if there were any children who would take music-lessons! She distributed printed cards among all her friends, and those who ought to be friendly. She threw her whole soul into the enterprise. At the end of two months she had obtained two pupils! I hardly know how to account for her want of success!

Most families, I dare say, had teachers already provided for their young people. Others thought she was too old! She called herself forty-five! I don't know whose business it was if she had been forty-five for seven or eight years. Perhaps she had conscientious scruples about getting any older. Forty-five is in my estimation quite old enough for an old maid.

She struggled on for two or three years in a sort of transition state between existence and starvation. At one time she had five scholars, but, to get them, she had to take them under the established price, and, in one instance, failed to collect that. She must dress well; not only her natural tastes but her possible ultimate success, demanded it, and, being uncommonly tall, it was a serious drain upon her poverty-stricken pocket. Her friends tired, at last, of giving her a gratuitous home, and told her so. She looked for board, but single maiden ladies are not usually at a premium in that market. Gentlemen always take the preference. Miss Terrapin wondered at it, and no wonder she did! At one place she ventured to ask the reason. The lady seemed surprised that she should not understand!

"Because gentlemen are away all day, never come to lunch, don't keep servants always running to attend to their calls and their fires, have good appetites, and mind their own business."

"Some gentlemen!" was Miss Terrapin's laconic reply.

She found a place in the end, where, by sleeping on a sofa in the parlor, and helping the lady with her plain sewing, she could make a temporary lodgment.

She advertised for copying and earned a little that way. My aunt Hatty employed her at one time to take charge of her house for a few months, while she was in Washington. She had a gift at needle-work. For years, she had made her own dresses. I don't know what was the flaw in her understanding, that she should have been so long finding her proper level. But, at last, she rented rooms and opened a dress-making establishment. She succeeded, for she had a natural talent lying in that direction, and while the world and Chicago stand people must dress. Her shop hung with the latest New York and Paris patterns, and the back-room revealed a dozen or more girls hard at work for their daily bread.

Spicy asked her to step round and see me, as we had several garments we wished made out of the house, and very little time to attend to it ourselves. She came in the evening and talked fast and said a great deal. I took note of it, because some people who talk fast never say anything. She was thoroughly master of the situation. She could tell me just what was suitable to wear in any emergency. She knew exactly how many pieces of wearing-apparel the young lady needed for her school-year. She secretly informed us what the prevailing styles would be in the winter and spring, and how much cheaper goods could be bought in Chicago than New York. She offered to attend to all my shopping for a trifling commission.

A valuable acquisition to my circle of acquaintance, surely! Her name suddenly became a household word. It was: Ask Miss Terrapin about that; Miss Terrapin told me this. It will nev-

er do, Miss Terrapin says they are not worn. How many pocket-handkerchiefs did Miss Terrapin say I must have? Where is the sample Miss Terrapin sent me? This waist pinches, but Miss Terrapin says it is none too tight. Miss Terrapin says I do not walk good in high-heeled boots. Ask Miss Terrapin whether it shall be trimmed with fringe or lace; and similar expressions constituted the small-talk of the family. I did not see how I had ever done without Miss Terrapin!

She was always laughing about my low ceilings. She could not stand erect, only on the high side of the blue-room. She said she should not like to be the one to go into that dungeon of a closet. She should expect such a place to be haunted. She did not believe in ghosts, but should never doubt any one's veracity who said she had seen one in there.

"Speaking of ghosts," she went on, "they have one good trait, they never do anybody any harm, and it always vexes me to see folks so stupidly afraid of them."

"That is even so," replied Spicy; "don't you think some one ought to befriend the poor creatures? Here my ghost has been locked out of civilized society all summer, and now I suppose she would not come back even if we invited her. We ought to have treated her better, more as became her station among the spirits; it would have been so much more respectable, I mean for the ghost."

"This ribbon is too narrow, Mrs. Belmore. I will stop at Palmer's and get you one the right width. You will find the lace cheaper at Shay's, and you will want a half-yard more to finish the un-

der-sleeves. Shall I give Mrs. Hopson your order for the hat?"

Miss Terrapin was standing with her bonnet and gloves on, leaning over Spicy's shoulder, who was persisting in great efforts to accomplish the joining of two rough pieces of wash-blond.

We were in the blue-room, seamstresses and all, and there was not much unoccupied space. I should hardly have known the hour if the lunch-bell had not rung about that time, although it was plain that the sun had passed the meridian, from the way in which it was blistering the outside of the green window-shutters. The closet-door had not been shut since it was first unlocked, and we had all taken a turn in trying to admit air through the window, and make the place less like an oven than it really was, but without success. It was almost filled with finished garments, tossed loosely upon each other, and the window could no longer be reached without creeping along where the sharp roof met the floor. It was decidedly darkish in there as well as hot, and four or five freshly-ironed white skirts hitched on some hooks just by the door-way, rendered it darker and hotter still.

All at once there came a silence that was in itself acutely painful! It was as if a pall had suddenly been dropped over every person present! No one breathed, much less spoke! All our eyes rested upon the figure of a woman looking at us from the closet!

She had the appearance of standing on the second step down, and held in her hand a scroll of paper. And such a hand! So bony and attenuated! She was clad in white raiment. No shroud,

but a wrapper of cross-barred muslin, with pearl buttons! Her face was haggard and wan, her neck long and small, the veins and cords standing out prominently visible; her hair, drawn back plain from her high, sharp forehead, was caught up in a net; and her eyes, blacker than night, and fearfully glassy, wandered from one to another of our white, scared faces, with a terrified expression.

It was not long, could not have been more than three seconds, that we thus regarded each other, the six and the one. Then the one was gone, and not one of the six had the power to follow her!

Some minutes elapsed, when Miss Terrapin rallied her forces, and proposed to one of the sewing-girls to see where that woman had gone.

"I should rather you would undertake the job," was the reply.

"I am willing enough, but I am so long all in one direction, that I am afraid it would not be practicable."

I was as one petrified!—not so much with absolute fear, although there is no use in denying the sensation, as in my utter inability to account for the phenomenon. Spicy must have been similarly affected, for, letting her work slide under her feet, she started up, threw herself into my arms, and burst into a fit of weeping almost hysterical. Miss Terrapin tried to console her.

"It is nothing but some crazy person. Don't mind it. She wouldn't touch a hair of your head. And she has gone, too—is half a mile away by this time probably."

"Half a mile away! Miss Terrapin, if you will show me how she got away, if she has really gone, you will do me

the greatest kindness," exclaimed Spicy. "It is all very well to theorize over who or what she is or may be, but solve the problem of how she comes and goes, and I am ready to imagine the crazy part."

"There is a trap-door, perhaps?"

"No, there is not. We have investigated that matter thoroughly."

"And the window?"

"Is fitted tighter than the marriage-relation."

"Are you sure?"

"Try it for yourself!"

"How can I get there?"

"Bend as others have done before you."

"I will see what I can do, for your sake, Miss Spicy."

She reached the door with a graceful stoop, and stepped down into the closet.

"There is no one here. Now, if it is possible, I will give the window a shake."

She worked her way along to it, nearly putting her hand through a band-box on the route, and found it just as Spicy had represented.

"When your dry-goods are taken out I should like to come in here again. If there is any sly panelling, I am just the one to detect it;" her voice sounded as if her lungs were packed in cotton batting.

She crawled back, scraping her head against the roof, upsetting her bonnet and wig. She looked as much like a ghost herself as a human being could, when she landed at last in the blue-room. I should have volunteered to regulate her head-gear if she had not towered so high above me. She seemed quite disconcerted when she looked in the glass, and saw her gray hairs on exhibition.

"It was hereditary in our family to

have the hair turn young," she remarked, by way of apology.

Spicy choked. I thought she was going to laugh, and stepped on her toes.

"Why don't you use invigorators and make it stay the right color?" she asked, quite gravely.

"Because they all contain sugar of lead, which acts as a slow poison to the system. I know a lady who has been made totally deaf, and another has lost her eyesight, through its use. The physicians say death is frequently traced to the same cause."

"Horrible! But why not let the hair look as it will? I see no need of dyeing it or covering it up either! I like white hair for my part. I should not wonder if it was all in vogue some day. If the fashion ever does come round, I shall be the first one to dye mine white or gray color!"

Miss Terrapin was getting her locks and puffs and braids all straightened by that time.

"Really," she said, "about that ghost or whatever she is, I am a good deal puzzled, I must confess. She looked to me like a thing of flesh and blood, and yet her disappearance has a savor of the supernatural. By-the-way, have you ever been into that gift-book store on Randolph Street? They will sell you a book as cheap as you can get it anywhere else, and let you draw a prize. They have silver and jewelry and gold-pens and the like, and, last week, one day, I thought I would try my luck, and I got this thimble! It looks like gold, and wears just as well."

We all took it and examined it, and passed judgment upon it.

"Did you notice the ghost's hand? Wasn't it skeletony? Talking about the thimble reminded me of it, for she had on a very handsome gold thimble."

I had not seen it, neither had Spicy.

"It was on her right hand, and she held the scroll in her left," continued Miss Terrapin. "I am sure I shall never forget her. When Miss Spicy is fairly away, I will come and dig into the mystery. You see I am good for most any thing. If there is a ghost indeed, we will make sure of it, and find out whose murdered bones she represents."

"Good for you, Miss Terrapin! I will remember you in my will!" exclaimed Spicy.—"Be sure and write me all about it, Meddie. It will make such a nice variety for me in dull New York; something for me to tell the girls after the rooms are dark, you know!"

Years afterward, on a never-to-be-forgotten night of horrors, both Spicy and Miss Terrapin were plunged into the abyss of knowledge which they so much coveted, and the mournful mystery of the ghost-closet was unriddled, to their shocked and awe-stricken comprehensions.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRIP TO NEW YORK.

OUR trip to New York was in most respects a pleasant one. It rained when we arrived, but we found a close carriage, and were driven directly to Miss Gilbert's. We were shown into an elegant parlor, and in a few minutes kindly and cordially welcomed by the lady herself. The room assigned to Spicy was on the fourth floor, and she was to have

three young-lady companions. They were not expected for a week, so I stayed with her until the next day. Three teachers, all ladies of culture, met us at the dinner-table, and the bill of fare was so tempting that I was in a happy frame of mind, when we adjourned to the family sitting-room for prayers. Miss Gilbert questioned Spicy about her music, and asked her to play. She complimented her on her proficiency, and suggested one of the most popular masters.

It was my desire that she should finish her course and graduate in two years, and Miss Gilbert saw nothing whatever to prevent. I administered the usual parental caution about never allowing the young lady to go in the street alone, and expressed myself decidedly opposed to her making any gentleman acquaintances. Miss Gilbert gave me a digest of her rules and regulations, with which I was well pleased, and after saying a great many affectionate things, and giving continual advice from the time we went to our room until we left it the next morning, I bade my darling good-by for a year. She shed a few tears, they were always ready to flow at her bidding; but she should be perfectly contented, she said, as soon as her trunk came, it would be such fun to take out all her new things, and stretch them round in the closets, and arrange the ornaments on the bureau.

"What ornaments, deary? I did not know as you had brought any."

"Oh, yes. My brush and comb, and ink-bottle, and my picture of Fred Gildersleeve."

"Spicy to the last," I said, squeezing and shaking her. "You know,

though, you are not to flirt with anybody."

"Not even with Fred Gildersleeve! Now, that is too much, Meddie! I have your kind permission to hunt for him, and if I should happen to find him I should be compelled to shake my pocket-handkerchief or give some sign. Could not help it. I have known him a long time. He is the one for me, who sticketh closer than a brother."

"If you should find him! Very well. Wait till you do and then write to me," I said. "Meanwhile if that old, musty picture is any comfort, adore it to your heart's content."

"Yes, 'em. That is what I shall do. Good-by—good-by—good-by!"

And I good-byed until my eyes were as rainy as my sister's.

I returned to Albany for a few days, but I was restless until I was in my little home again. It was a trifle quiet and still without either Leonardus or Spicy, but I managed to fill up my time. Bright was at the age when children develop fast, and his cunning ways were extremely fascinating. I dipped into charities, and church festivals, and musical *soirées*. The autumn was remarkable for pleasant days, and December appeared without any great Chicago freeze. I could not make up my mind to pass the holidays alone, so I sent out some invitations and prepared to entertain company.

Spicy wrote me regularly every week. A few extracts from her letters will reveal the tenor of her life in New York. From one, under date of October 7th, I clip the following:

"I am just from the conversation-

hour. I forget whether I have told you what that is or not, so here goes. We take our work, embroidery or stockings to mend according to our proclivities, and go down to the back-parlor, where we meet mademoiselle and chat an hour in French—*real* French, as Mrs. Wing used to say about her furniture. You remember, don't you, how we called there just after her new house was built, and about her taking us up-stairs and telling us such and such articles were *real* rose-wood, and those wardrobes were lined with *real* cedar? I suppose she thought we had been accustomed to imitation all our lives, as she had. But about our French. I cannot help thinking that if a Frenchman were to drop in among us he would take us for *real* Greeks! I improve some, but I am positively disheartened about ever becoming a celebrated linguist. This is a good school, but I have discovered that it requires native genius to be a good scholar. We are particularly well drilled in the proprieties. Daily lectures free. The chief heads are: to rise and give elders the easy-chairs, bow out of a room backward, pause when any one else is speaking, and never ask for butter the second time. My three room-mates are expected to-morrow. Their names are Miss Muffet and Miss Tuffet and Miss Buffet, as near as I can find out. My present anxiety is to know who will be entitled to the first chance at the wash-stand! Perhaps we will draw cuts, or render courtesy to age, or submit the question to a council of arbitration! What an aggravation to have a front-room on Fifth Avenue and not be allowed to go within three feet of the window! I hear the drum beat, and a

band of soldiers are passing, and yet I cannot look out without getting one of those horrid black marks! As a sort of let off to my pent-up emotions, I have suspended Fred Gildersleeve by a blue ribbon in the middle of the window, to see for me."

The next was under date of October 9, 1862:

"The subject of my to-day's letter is *space*. It seems just now as if it would be the subject of all my future correspondence. Oh, for a cot in the wilderness or a spot to call my own! Send me your ghost-closet, and be my noble benefactress. Do I want the ghost, too, did I hear you ask? Certainly, if she wants to come, for, I dare say, she would not try to monopolize my pegs with her clothes. If you believe, or if you don't, I have but two pegs! Just to think of it! But two pegs! There are but eight pegs in all, and, of course, I get my share; but, is it not dreadful? Then I only have one bureau-drawer, and my trunk is in the sub-cellar, five flights of stairs away!

"Miss Muffet was here last year, and says she got along very well after the first week, although full four-fifths of her clothes she did not see until spring! Miss Tuffet will manage, I guess, because she has not but three dresses with her, and one is always put away anyhow; but she grumbles awfully about room for her bows, for it is one of her hobbies to have one for every day in the year and two for Sundays. Miss Buffet is in the same wretched condition that I am. She has brought an elephantine cargo, and has no place to put it and no chance to wear it. We have enough between us

to start a ready-made clothing-store in Kansas or California. What could Miss Terrapin have been thinking of? And it strikes me as absurd to have so much made-up outside of New York anyhow, for when we get here it isn't quite the thing, with all due deference to Miss Terrapin, and, if it has got to be put over until next year, why, worse and worse! Miss Muffet says we don't need much at school, and I begin to think she is right. Miss Gilbert wishes to see us plainly dressed. She says too much dress is in bad taste. I thought I would be stunning one Sunday afternoon, and appeared down-stairs in my blue silk, and was sent straight back to take it off! That was while my trunk stood by me, like a friend in trouble. No danger of any such reproof hereafter. I shall wear my mouse-merino till I tear or burn it, if it is until I graduate. My water-proof hangs with my cloak upon one peg, and my black-silk dress, blanket-shawl, and umbrella, assuage the loneliness of the other.

"There is an elegant young man sits near us in church. He often steps back and waits while we pass down the aisle. Don't worry, Meddie; I practise the Christian graces and never look at him. I am going to grow up like Miss Terrapin, the good old spinster! The only place where I have looked for Fred Gildersleeve yet has been in the 'Directory.' He was not there, but Miss Muffet, who is our oracle, says that the first people in New York never are there. Hark! the study-bell! By-by, Meddie! Don't forget to send me some jelly-cake before Thanksgiving."

We had some distant cousins living in New Jersey. The two young ladies

in the family were shining lights in fashionable society. When they heard that Spicy was at Miss Gilbert's school, they called and invited her to spend the holiday vacation with them. I had at first objected, as we were very slightly acquainted with the Gladstones, and I considered my sister much too young for the round of gayety such a visit would involve. But I was finally induced to consent, provided she was treated under all circumstances as a school-girl.

She wrote me but once while there, but was enthusiastic in her description of the entertainments and amusements, which she was enjoying with a great relish. I was too busy to notice the length of time which elapsed between her letters, but I was reminded of it afterward when a very full double sheet came at a moment when I was binding up a sharp cut in dear little Bright's forehead. He had fallen down-stairs, and Nursy Brown had been cut to the heart for having left him to get a glass of water. Two wounded ones, the latter the most seriously of the two, and, with an ashen face down which great scalding tears were trickling, she gave unerring evidence of a common humanity. I made her lie down on the bed, and in the rocker by her side I soothed and hushed the little one. When all was quiet, I broke open Spicy's letter and read aloud:

"DARLING MEDDIE: I could not help it! The days slipped away so fast, and I had so little time to myself. I will not neglect you any more if you will be forgiving. I am back in my school safe and sound, and we have soup on Mondays and fish on Fridays as usual. The New-



Year's ball was a prodigious affair. Cousin Sue wore diamonds and point-lace, and was the belle of the evening. I was the country miss in white muslin, with a pink tunic trimmed with down. Cousin Julia was sick, and did not go. That is why I did not mention her before myself—according to Miss Gilbert.

"I expected to keep the wall-flowers company, talk with the mammas, and see how the ladies managed their trails, and was perfectly aghast when I found, before the end of the first half-hour, that little me was engaged for every dance! I suppose it was out of respect for my grand relations. I got very much excited with the exercise, and my cheeks were burning as if full of live coals, when, just as one of the sets broke up and my partner was escorting me to a seat, a gentleman was introduced to me. I didn't catch the name, but it sort o' rattled off like *Gilliersleeve*! I was so confused I did not know what to do with my hands or eyes, and, after asking me to dance and I, of course, declining—oh, how sorry I was that my card was full!—he walked away, and I never noticed until that moment that it was the same gentleman who goes to our church, and whom I have told you about before. I saw him several times afterward, but he was always devoted to some lady, and never noticed me again. I tried to imagine that he was the original of my picture, but I did not see much resemblance, if the truth must be told. He is a great deal the handsomer of the two. I pointed him out to Cousin Sue and inquired if she knew him; but no, only she said he was the most distinguished-looking gentleman in the room. I was

in despair. But my little romance exploded as we were getting into our carriage to go home. I heard somebody shout, 'This way, Hildegroove, this way,' and a tall figure ran past, whom I recognized as my hero.

"The morning before I came back to New York, I drew the window-shade up about daylight and found it raining. I slept with Cousin Sue, and she must have been trying to join the two parts of a dream together just then, for she mumbled:

"'You can wear my overshoes and umbrella.'

"'How do you wear umbrellas?' I asked.

"That thoroughly waked her, and she laughed.

"'You can wear my overshoes and water-proof, if you like that any better.'

"'What, when they are a mile too big for me!'

"'It won't matter; no one who knows you will be out so early.'

"As I had none of my own with me, there was no alternative, and as soon as breakfast was over I was so well rigged out that I might have journeyed to Jericho without getting damp. Cousin Walter was my escort. We had to wait on the corner a few minutes for the car—a Jersey fashion when it rains—and then found it filled and dripping. I didn't mind standing, for it was not far to the ferry. But we were kept there waiting for the ferry-boat a long time. Some train was just in, and a hearse was in waiting. Walter made inquiries, and told me that it was the body of Brigadier-General Lewis Vance, who had been killed in a skirmish near Fredericks-

burg, Virginia, and was being conveyed to Boston for burial."

I stopped reading and looked sharply at Nursy Brown, but her face was covered with the corner of the pillow, and she gave no sign of interest or intelligence.

"So many passengers coming upon the boat from the steam-cars made it very crowded. Walter gave his seat to an old lady with a bundle, and stepped a little beyond me to speak to some one whom he knew. Before the boat was quite to the dock the crowd all pushed forward, and who should I see but my lord of the long name! He was quite a way off, and kept his distance; never once looked at me, and I was thankful!

"Oh, how muddy it was at the foot of Cortlandt Street! Black and slippery and soft, as if some one had been moulding grease into the soil for ages! It takes all the conceit out of the most pompous to go through it! Standing on some corner waiting for an omnibus, Cousin Walter did something to my water-proof. I thought he was shaking off mud, and told him he would have better luck when it got dry. He is a man of large ideas and few words, and I was not surprised that he deigned me no answer. He never thinks I am worth talking to. But who should I sit down beside in that very omnibus but Mr. Hildegroove, or whatever his name is! He lifted the nicest kind of a hat, and displayed beautiful wavy hair, and hoped I was quite well. Cousin Walter looked fire-daggers at me, but how could I help making my best manners back to him? Was there any sin in it? And how was I to know that Cousin Walter wanted

an introduction himself? and how could I have introduced a person whose name I did not know, even if I ought to have known it? I was terribly uncomfortable, with Cousin Walter's disapproving eyes fixed upon me from the opposite seat, but the gentleman said nothing more, and at last I landed at my school.

"Now, the funny part is to come. I received a note from Cousin Sue next day, telling me how Walter asked her when he got home what a tuck and a flounce was. She illustrated with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Well," he says, "if you expect me to be polite to that little Western girl, you must try to put some style on her. I was not at all pleased this morning with the fit of her outside garment, and succeeded in getting a tuck and a flounce into it, which was some improvement. A gentleman whom I often see in the gold-room recognized her in the stage. I suppose he has met her at some of the parties where she has been with you. He is one of the *hi-fa-lu-tin*, who always win in the money market, and the New-York belles esteem him a great catch. If he knew me, as he probably did, although we have no acquaintance, he must have thought I was in great business toting that little dowdy round!"

"Sue said she thought it was a good joke on Walter for being so puffed out with cheap pride. Between you and I, Meddie, he is a veritable coxcomb! But the water-proof! It had been hung down-stairs somewhere to dry, and I ran and got it to see for myself, and, true as gospel, it was pinned and hitched up in ever so many places! What a figure I must have cut!

"You will write to Leonardus about General Vance, won't you? I would if I knew where he was stationed. Was it not singular about my coming upon that hearse at the ferry?"

"We are going to have gingerbread for lunch. The bill of fare is coming up through the speaking-tubes. Miss Buffet has got a box from home—candies, and oranges, and sweetmeats, enough to keep the attending physician in business for a month to come, as Miss Muffet says. She is going to treat us this evening after the monitor has been round. Miss Gilbert has seen my picture of Fred Gildersleeve, and given me a little private advice. She says I am too young to love. Those are not her precise words, but that was the drift of them. No young lady should cherish a picture, unless it was of her brother, or some near kin. Books now, society in the future. I played melancholy and kissed Fred, and she said she must write to you on the subject. Good-by again, but only for a week. I will be as prompt hereafter as a man at the funeral of his wife.

"Your loving sister, SPION."

Bright was fast asleep when I had finished reading, and so was Nursy Brown, as near as I could discover. I laid him on the foot of the bed and covered him up warm. The fire was getting low, and I put on some coal. Then I had my hands to wash. Nursy did not move. I never knew her to go to sleep before in the daytime! How strange! But she had had such a shock when Bright fell! No, I would not disturb her for the world!

I went and brought my portfolio to

the nursery to write to Leonardus. He was down on the Mississippi, and it took my letters a long time to reach him. He saw newspapers but seldom, so he probably had not heard of General Vance's death.

I had been scratching away for an hour, when Bright began to nestle, and then opened his eyes. I took him in my arms and talked and sang to him; the sun went down. Maggie came in and lighted the gas, and finally the dinner-bell rang! Nursy Brown had not moved. I must speak to her; she certainly would not care to sleep any longer. So, rising, I laid my hand on her arm.

"What is it?" she asked, without stirring.

"I thought you would like to have me wake you."

"Yes, I am obliged to you."

"I hope you are not sick?"

"No, thank you."

But she did not offer to rise. She did not look at me even.

"Shall I leave baby with you or take him with me?"

I asked the question deferentially, for she had settled all those little questions for so long that I never thought of interfering with her programme.

"Take him, if you please."

She had not come down for him at eight o'clock, so I carried him up to her. She was lying where I had left her, in the same position, except that her little beauty of a hand was clasping her pearl-white throat.

"You must be feeling badly? I will undress baby," I said, stopping by the bedside.

"Very well."

"Can't I do something for you?" I asked.

"No, thank you."

I was nonplussed; what should I do? Go away from her if she were suffering, without persisting in efforts to relieve her? I felt that I had been dismissed, but ought I to acknowledge the dismissal? Bright had no idea of such a thing if I had, and, as soon as costumed for the night, put in his voice effectively. His mamma did not stand on a par with his nurse in his youthful estimation.

"Please leave him with me," she roused herself to say, as I was trying to force him from the room against his will. He had carried his point, and was correspondingly mollified—even put his sweet lips out toward me for a make-up kiss. And so I left them.

She appeared next morning as usual, and attended to all her duties. I was out most of the day, and saw very little of her.

The following week I spent in Milwaukee, and after that I was very busy with a new society, which had been organized for the relief of soldiers' families; and blustering March, with all its cold and dust, was upon us.

I seemed to feel as if some great calamity was going to befall me. I was not subject to fits of depression, but spring months are hard to get over at the West unless one has an iron constitution. I tried to lay it to the weather, then I took some medicine for dyspepsia. I read all the war news before six o'clock in the morning also, to try to get up an appetite for my breakfast. Leonardus wrote often and hopefully. As yet, he

had not received a scratch in battle, and his health was excellent. But the affairs of the country were very much mixed, and there was no telling where our troubles would end.

How I did miss Spicy! But she would be with me all summer, after the middle of June! I counted the days until then.

I would try to cast off the clouds which were obscuring the brightness of my present—"Live them down," as Miss Terrapin often said. "Enjoy life as it passes, so as to be still young when you are old," is her motto, and, "Never borrow trouble until it comes," might be added with advantage.

I did not have to borrow it, my trouble came sure and swift, and far too soon! A note was left on my table one morning, which I read several times before I could believe the evidence of my own senses. It was from Nursy Brown.

"MY DEAR MRS. BELMORE: I have been trying for several days to nerve myself for the parting which cannot longer be delayed. Your baby has coiled himself into every fibre of my heart, and your own kindness will be gratefully remembered while life lasts. But Fate so wills it, and I have fixed the time for my departure on Thursday next. I could not bring myself to the point of holding any conversation with you on the subject, and, since I shall suffer most by the breaking of the ties which bind me here, I beg that you will not allude to the subject by word or note, while I remain under your roof.

"With sincere regard,

"NURSY BROWN."

## CHAPTER XI.

## MRS. BELMORE CANNOT BE COMFORTED.

IT WAS as if my right arm had been amputated! I never knew, until she was gone, how much I was indebted to Nursery Brown for the home-comfort and peace of mind of the last year and a half. Bright had grown quite beyond me, knew better how his clothes ought to be put on than I did myself, was inclined to play horse with my sash-ribbons and curtain-cords, and could run the fastest and catch the hardest colds of any boy of two years in all North America. I employed a young, tidy-looking girl to take care of him, but to fill the place of the one I had lost was not among human possibilities.

And every portion of the house showed that there had been a change. The pictures hung awry, and the mantel-ornaments leaned the wrong way. The music persisted in getting at sixes and sevens, the books were no longer arranged on the shelves in the order of the volumes, the newspapers had a way of lying round where they pleased, and the cat slept on the parlor-sofa.

The cook, too, came to me for instructions, every morning, and, it was so tiresome to always keep the bill-of-fare filled out; besides, there was my linen to be looked over, and my silver to be counted, once a week. It was not that I was indolently disposed, or unequal to the task of managing my household affairs, but simply that the care had been taken from my shoulders, and so smoothly and skilfully managed, that the house had had the appearance of running itself. The very atmosphere was an aching void,

I could not reconcile myself to it easily. It was as if some portion of my life had gone out, never to return.

I wanted to make her a present before she left, since I could in no other way express my appreciation of her disinterested services. But I was at a great loss to decide what it should be. I hit upon various articles of dress, but rejected them immediately, for I fancied she would not receive any such gift from me. Finally, I decided to get Bright's picture taken on ivory, and the last thing before she passed over my threshold I placed it in her hands.

What a look she gave me!—so full of tender, regretful meaning!

"May God bless you!" she said, and that was all.

Bright cried for her every night and morning, and whenever there was a lull in his plays, during the day, for weeks. It kept my sorrow fresh in my heart, and, when my baby's birthday came round, I could not get up the proper measure of enthusiasm over it—not even when the little voice put in his queries:

"Ware Bight's birf-day? Bight's birf-day up-stairs? Baun dot Bight's birf-day?"

Spicy condoled with me as soon as she heard of my misfortune.

"I thought you would keep her forever, and that at her death she would declare herself an empress, and make us all prime-ministers' wives. All, means you and me, for what splendid representatives Leonardus and Fred Gilder-sleeve would be at court!"

"The little goose!" I could not help stopping to exclaim.

—"Every thing about her was

perfectly regal. The very sort of a *person* whom I should have taken off my hat to, if I had been a man. I do pity you from the bottom of my heart, Med-dia. But you must consider how greatly blessed above other women you have been by having had her to live with you at all, instead of declaring yourself the most miserable of beings because she has left you. Where do you suppose she has gone? Sent her little, old, black trunk to the Great Central Depot, did she? Eastward bound! If I had been there, she would not have got off without some quizzing; but, as you say, if she had a secret to keep, she would keep it to the death, and all my feeble ingenuity would probably have failed to surprise it out of her.

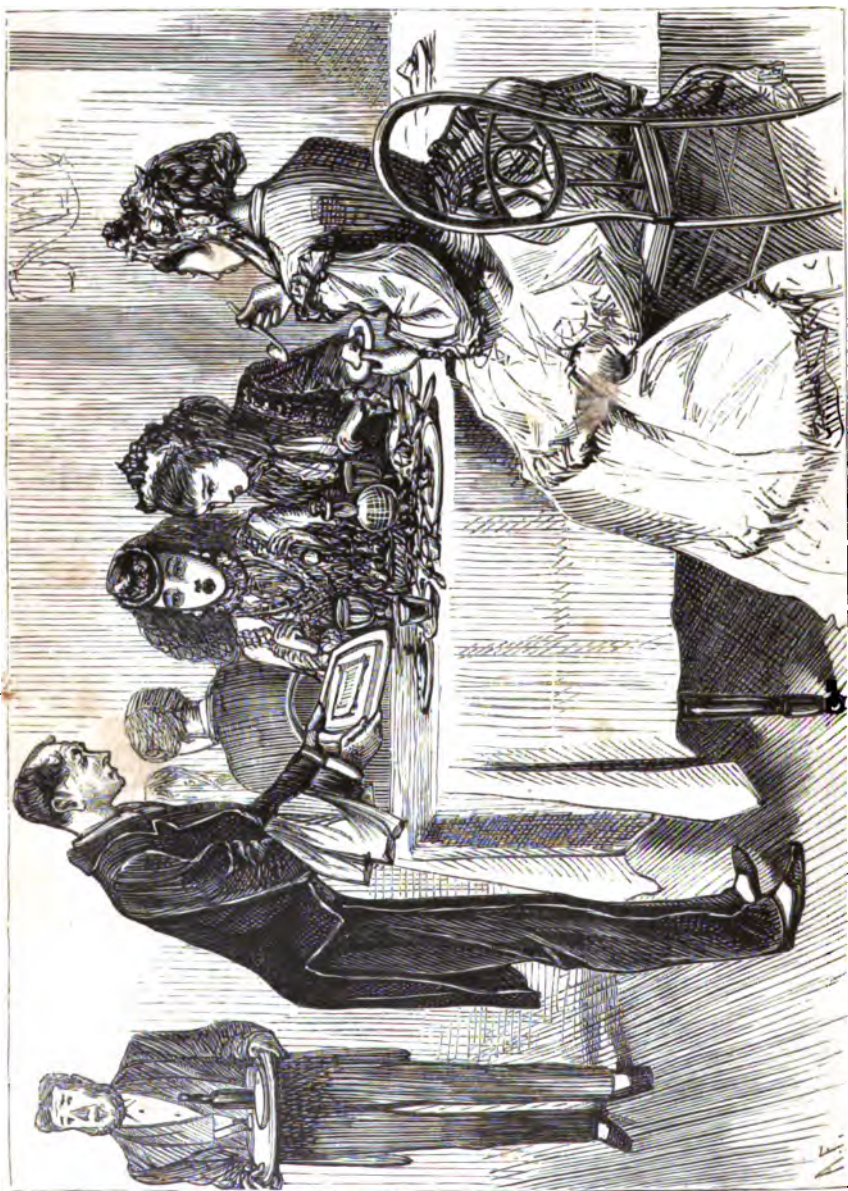
"We have had the greatest time with our gas! It gave such a splendid light in the first part of the winter! But for weeks and weeks it has been worse than any tallow-candle! We could not see to study by it, and had to go to the school-room, and, if we wanted to write a composition or a letter in the solitude of our apartments, it could not be done, and Miss Tuffet could not say her prayers (she is an Episcopalian, and reads them), so we appointed ourselves a committee of investigation to find what we could find. And what do you guess we did find? Cotton stuffed in the burners! A specimen of New-York economy! And what do you guess we did? Pulled it out, every speck, and put it in a bottle for a keepsake! Would not you have done the same? We have light enough for a million now, and, if it gets dim, we shall know the remedy hereafter.

"I think Miss Gilbert is a gem of a woman, and not a grain too strict, for

we are a hard set to manage. But, Meddie dear, what is it that makes poor, sinful mortals always want to go by the rule of contraries? For instance, it is a capital offence to read novels. I never cared for them before, but, since I have heard so much said about it, I can't pass a paper-stand without my feet begin to twist, and I sometimes hinder the whole procession long enough to see if there is a yellow cover in sight. We send Bob, the colored boy, to buy them for us, and, as he cannot read a word, he selects according to color? We hide them in our beds and devour them while the world is dreaming. We used to buy our own candles, and squeeze into the closet, and take turns about reading aloud, but since we have saved the institution such a bill of expense on gas, we consider ourselves entitled to a *bonus*, so now we pin all our black dresses up to the window and wedge the cracks of the door, and turn the gas up as high as it will go, and have a gay time.

"We have just had a fast-day—meetings in the churches to pray for colleges. I suppose they got through with primary and boarding schools long ago, and that is why we had bread-pudding for dessert as usual. Our monthly holiday was last Saturday, and nearly all the teachers, as well as the girls, had some place to go and visit, and it was stupid enough for Miss Buffet and me, who were left behind. So what did we do, but ask Miss Gilbert for some one to take us to Stewart's, to buy some gloves? We were just out, hadn't a pair to our hands, could not go to church the next day unless we were supplied (don't you ever tell of it, but we gave all we were possessors of, that





"We stared at it with eyes and mouths wide open!"



very morning, to little Bob to distribute among his sisters and friends). It was the exact truth that we were telling!

"We knew that Miss Gilbert had no teacher to send with us, but we hinted that the house-keeper would do just as well; we would recompense her for the trouble, of course. Miss Gilbert reluctantly consented, and charged us to be back before lunch, which we faithfully promised. The house-keeper is a kind of Miss Terrapin—believes just as anybody else does that she is with. Not that Miss Terrapin has no mind of her own!—I ought not to say that, particularly after that ghost-hunt!—but is agreeably inclined to what she thinks you most agreeably inclined. Her name is Dobbs. Whenever we complain, Dobbs is on our side. If we want to pretend sick to get rid of a lesson, she always declares it is mean for us to be kept in our rooms and be fed with tea-and-toast, and have a doctor called in. If we are late to a meal, she always puts in a word of commiseration about the unfairness of the rule that we must take it cold. Yes, she was just the person we wanted with us that day. We whispered something in her ear in the stage, and she nodded acquiescence. We bought our gloves, and an extra pair for Dobbs. Then we steered for Delmonico's.

"Such a lunch as we ordered! And how the waiters bowed and run for us! Miss Buffet was for calling for every dish on the bill-of-fare that was new and strange to her, for, she said, it was a great educational opportunity, and we ought to embrace it. But I had serious objections to venturing beyond my depth. As it was, our table was full!

An odd collection of goodies! But we enjoyed them, and so did Dobbs. I did not know how I should ever manage to get my ice-cream down, I had eaten so many other things, and Miss Buffet suggested that I had better stand up. No, I would rather Dobbs should eat it for me, and she did without the formality of an objection.

"One could eat three or four such stingy little dishes," she said.

"I thought she would get along with *two*, and didn't take the hint. Last of all came the bill, on a silver salver! We stared at it with eyes and mouths wide open! We thought there must be some mistake. We had not counted the cost. But we did count our change, and found we had seven dollars and fifty cents between us, and were two dollars short even then! If that amount of money had been eaten it must be paid, else they might detain us as impostors! What would Miss Gilbert say, if it should ever come to her ears? We wondered if such things were published in the papers! We might send Dobbs home for the money, but, if we did, she would surely lose her head for leaving us in a restaurant alone! One of us might go? What! One of Miss Gilbert's pupils ride in a car by herself! Then we two go together!

"No, we were in a worse predicament than the man who wanted to get his fox and geese and bushel of corn across the river, and could not take but one at a time. We wished we had stayed at home. We wished we were anywhere but where we were.

"We carried on our conversation in low tones, for the waiters kept hovering about, as if they suspected something

wrong. The longer we sat there, the more embarrassed we became, and the less prospect there seemed of getting out of our dilemma.

"At the table next us, near the window, two gentlemen had been feeding on one small quail ever since we came in. I sat so that I could not see them very well; but Dobbs, who had a full view, had once or twice remarked that it was sheer affectation for grown-up men to pretend that they had such delicate appetites! It did not interest me then so much as it has since. The one with his back toward us rose suddenly, turned round and put out his hand, and said:

"'Good-morning, Miss Merriman. I am happy to meet you again,' and then walked directly into the street.

"I had as a matter of course acknowledged the courtesy by shaking hands with him, and he was gone before I had collected my senses enough to discover that he had left in my palm—what do you guess? A neatly-folded two-dollar bill!

"O, Meddie! I almost died with mortification! I shall never want any more surreptitious lunches. There was nothing to be done but pay the bill and get away from that horrid place! The mercury was down to zero, but I was in such a heat that, as soon as I got home, I shut the furnace-register, and took the coldest kind of a bath. It did no good whatever, although I almost made the water sizzle when I got into it. Miss Gilbert was out, and there was no one to make a memorandum of the date of our return. Was not that lucky? But how am I to get that two dollars back to Mr. Hilderberger? I must do it some-

how. I have written half a dozen pretty little notes and torn them up again, and finally concluded to inclose my simple card, with the two dollars wrapped round it, in an envelop, and not say a thing. But I don't know his name for sure, and I don't know where he lives; and how shall I ever get it to him? I might ask Cousin Walter, perhaps, but I don't expect to go over there again before the summer-vacation, and if I should write a note, and tell him the circumstances, he would be sure to report me at headquarters, and have me put in a strait-jacket, for he is the most finikin of mortals. Do you suppose I can give it to him while we are coming out of church? I brush very near him sometimes. And then, what if anybody should see me do it? Death and imprisonment! Death first, and the middle-room without any windows afterward! I should not mind it so much, only I should be tortured into confession, and have to bring Miss Buffet and Dobbs to grief with me! They advise me to let the two dollars slide, but I won't. It shall go back whence it came, if it takes me till I am as old as Methuselah to get it there! But I will try to be cautious, for I am not disposed to get into any worse snarl. Shower down a little good advice upon me, Meddie. I will take it, whether it be sweet or bitter, without a wry face. I have put Fred Gildersleeve into a paper box, and laid my Bible on the top of it, until this two-dollar affair blows over.

"Write soon to your

"SUFFERING SPICY."

Miss Terrapin came to see me often,

and always brought some new fashion with her. It was a diversion, and I encouraged her in doing so. One day she spoke of a customer, a charming lady, who paid her bills in advance, and was such a model of elegance in her tastes.

"She abhors trimmings, but brings me the richest goods in the market to make up plain, and never wears blue," she said, one day.

It was in May or June, the latter part of the one, or the fore part of the other. I remember, because she was fitting me out to go for Spicy.

"That is unusual," I replied. "I have known several ladies who were sworn enemies to green, but blue is a favorite color. Few reject it altogether."

"It would be exceedingly becoming to her, I am sure," continued Miss Terrapin. "But there is no use in saying a word. Every thing is gray, black and gray, except two or three white wrappers for home-wear. She has a large property. I never knew it until yesterday, but she owns the block which my shop is in, on Lake Street. She asked me what rent I paid, and, when I told her, she remarked: 'That is too much to impose upon a woman. It shall be attended to.' She inherited the property from an uncle, old Judge Shubill, of Detroit—"

I interrupted her by a start, and the question—

"What is the lady's name?"

"Vance, Mrs. I. E. Vance, her card reads."

"Where does she live?"

"Just below you here, on the avenue. Not more than two blocks, or a

block and a half. Why? do you know her?"

"Certainly not. But I have heard of her."

And then I checked myself, for it did not seem right to gossip with a person of Miss Terrapin's well-known gossip character, about the sacred secrets of a stranger, which had come to my knowledge in such a singular manner. She was curious. Where had I heard of her? How had I heard of her? What had I heard of her? Was she a widow? How long had she been a widow? Had she any children? And many more questions of the same sort, she plied with practised dexterity. Some I answered by asking others, the real Yankee dodge, as Leonardus used to say, and some I otherwise evaded. But upon the whole I gained more information than my dress-maker, and congratulated myself that she had nothing new to tell her next customer, from having discussed the subject with me.

But I wrote Leonardus a long letter that evening, and told him the news.

"How I should like to call upon her! but it will never do, unless I meet her somewhere first, for I cannot refer to your acquaintance with General Vance without tearing open a terrible wound," was one of the closing clauses in the epistle.

Although it was late when I finished his letter, I could not seek my pillow until I had dashed off a few lines to Spicy. I could well imagine how she would clasp her little hands together, and exclaim, "Miss Terrapin forever!" I told her in the same sheet what day to expect me, and enjoined it upon her to

be all ready, even to the strapping of her trunks, as I was unwilling to leave Bright any longer than necessary.

Miss Terrapin volunteered to come and sleep in the house while I was away. I accepted her, for I could not put my finger on any one else more acceptable. That expression, translated into broad English, signifies that I prefer as a rule to open my doors to the intimate relationship of such people as will not count the long stitches in my towel-hems, and read all the letters that happen to lie around loose.

I started at night; ten-o'clock train on the Michigan Southern Railroad. Put baby to sleep first, and had a spell of the heartache. No more ease for me now, when I left him behind. Took a sleeping-car of course, and lay awake all night. Had a sick-headache next day, and was sullen to the lady who was so selfish as to crowd into the seat beside me. Emptied my lunch-basket out of the window, all but an orange, which I gave to a little boy, who would persist in pounding me on the shoulder. I thought it would take up his attention for a while, but he only struck me with the fruit. He stood on his mother's lap, and she, no doubt, thought it a pity to interfere with her darling's happiness. I looked round, and the child uttered something between a screech and a groan, and I saw that he was deaf and dumb! How my feelings changed! My heart went out in one broad gush of sympathy for the afflicted pair, for I saw at the same moment that the mother was a deaf-mute also! She was fair to look upon, and her face beamed with intelligence. I knew a little of the language,

and commenced a conversation, which we kept up until our midnight arrival in New York. Her husband was with her, a fine-looking gentleman, and, as they were going to the St. Nicholas as well as myself, he kindly took me under his charge.

In the morning, early, I was at Miss Gilbert's door. The school had closed three days previously, and Spicy was the only one of the pupils remaining. She had obeyed my instructions, and her trunks stood in the hall. I settled all her unpaid bills, expressed my thanks to Miss Gilbert for her kind and motherly care of my sister, drank a cup of tea in her parlor, as I declined lunch, ordered the trunk sent to the depot in time for the Western evening train, and fancied my duties all and well discharged, when Spicy caught hold of my arm:

"One thing more, Meddie; come upstairs, please."

I climbed those long four flights, and reached the sky-parlor panting.

"I hope it is something important, after all this trouble," I said.

"Indeed it is! I want you should get this two dollars to Mr. Hildedragon. I never can go to Chicago without it is paid! I did not know debts were such awful things before! It spoils every moment of my life!"

"But how do you expect me to do it?"

"I don't know at all! You are so clever you will be able to hatch up a way, I am sure. Go to Cousin Walter and make believe something, so as to find out where the gentleman lives or has an office, and then go and give it to him yourself, or hire a boy. Oh, dear!

don't shake your head, you are my sister, and I have nobody else to ask."

"It is a difficult task. You forget that I am just as much of a stranger to Walter Gladstone as to Mr. Hilde-dragon! Seems to me you called him by a different name from that when you wrote to me about it?"

"I dare say; I don't know what it is. It almost kills me."

"What, the name?"

"No. I can't stand any ridicule, Meddie. Please, oh, please, get this two dollars to him! I am so ashamed of myself for ever having got into such a fix that I cannot endure the sight of money. He passes us nearly every Sunday as we march up the avenue to church, and I don't dare to look up, nor ask a question of a single soul about him, though of course there is no one at the school who knows him from Adam, if I were to ask! But I get red in the face every time I hear a footstep behind us that sounds like his, and when he turns his head in church I give little hateful starts, and look off in some foreign direction, just as if I expected he were going to say, 'You owe me two dollars!' I can't live so any longer!"

"It is rather hard, deary," I said, throwing my arm about the pretty, rounded figure at my side, and imprinting a kiss or two upon the rosy lips which were pleading with such genuine earnestness for an impossibility.

"You will have to make the best of a bad bargain, for all I can see, though. Mischief brings its own reward, don't it? Who will give away gloves again for the sake of a shopping-expedition, I wonder? I cannot help you. The two

dollars you will have to keep until such time as you can return it in a suitable manner."

"That time never will come, Meddie. It is weeks since it has been scorching all the linings out of my pocket-books! It is as much worse than the ghost of blue-room notoriety, as the ghost was worse than Miss Terrapin's wig. Dear, dear, what shall I do?"

"Forget it now, say your good-bys, and we will go. We are to have an early dinner at the hotel."

She was bathed in tears when she put her arms round Miss Gilbert's neck for a parting kiss.

"Our young ladies don't leave for their homes with joy-beaming countenances, as they do in some schools," remarked the good lady.

"No, indeed! We leave too many unpaid debts behind us," blubbered Spicy.

## CHAPTER XII

### MRS. BELMORE'S RETURN TO CHICAGO.

EIGHT o'clock on a bright June morning and a great black train, with its fiery eye and living load, rumbled slowly over the waters of Lake Michigan, in front of the avenue where stood my unpretentious little home. How eagerly Spicy and I, from one of the sleeping-car windows, searched with our eyes through the dense foliage which surrounded it for some sign of life! But for a moment. Into the depot we plunged, and fathers of families, mothers and daughters, children and nurses, small boys and single men, elderly maidens and pretty widows

—with their satchels and bundles and wraps—simultaneously arose, and pushed and struggled for precedence in the dark aisle, and jostled each other on the steps, and scattered up and down the platform, hurrying into stages and hacks, and meeting friends with affectionate greetings, while trunks banged from the baggage-car in rapid succession, and check-numbers were shrieked in the universal din.

It was not far, but it would take us much too long to walk, so we stepped into the nearest coach, and were driven rapidly to my own door.

"There is Miss Terrapin! What a figure is hers! Look, Meddie! She reaches the roof as she stands on the northeast veranda! What should I do with myself if I were as tall as she is!" exclaimed Spicy, as we approached.

"There is my baby, too; so every thing is all right," was my remark, as the driver snapped open the door of the carriage to let us out.

"Any news?" I asked, as I sat down to a steaming breakfast.

"There are some letters for you in your room," replied Miss Terrapin.

I sent Maggie up for them. One from Leonardus; one from Aunt Minerva, asking us into the country for a week; and one from—it took me some time to find out who.

"The ladies from five or six different States have held a meeting since you left, for the purpose of trying to organize a sanitary-fair committee," said Miss Terrapin.

"Ah! now I understand. This letter is from Mrs. Waldemar, of Milwaukee, asking me to interest myself in the en-

terprise. But I cannot—positively cannot. It will take me away from my home too much. And Master Bright cannot spare his mamma—can he, precious?" and I turned the little face, which had been nestling in my neck while I drank my coffee, up toward mine.

"Bight tan go, too?"

"Not very well. No, we will let the Sanitary Fair take care of itself this year, and we will remember the soldiers by packing a big box full of every thing that is good to eat, and shipping it straight to your papa, won't we, baby?"

"Me no baby! Me big boy—me humbug!" said the little one.

"He has had a new teacher for a few days," and I laughed and pinched his cheeks.

Miss Terrapin laughed too, and was evidently flattered.

"I don't wonder that Nursy Brown stayed with you so long, since I have had little Bright to amuse me. I am not partial to children generally, but I could not get away from him yesterday until four o'clock in the afternoon! And I should not have gone then only I had promised Mrs. Vance to fit a sack-lining, and I went down to her house a moment to do it. I told her what had kept me, and what a dear little fellow he was, and she seemed greatly interested, and asked me to come back and get him, so that she could see him. We dressed him up like a doll, and he did look too sweet for any thing! I knew you would be quite willing for me to take him anywhere I chose, and when Mrs. Vance expressed fears lest you should object to his being brought to a stranger's house in your

absence, I shut her up at once by explaining the terms of intimacy we were on, and how much you relied on my judgment in every matter of importance. I told her all about your antecedents; how your grandfather was the governor of a State and your father a member of Congress, and how your mother was once presented to the Queen of England, and how your husband's ancestors were related to the royal family, and what honors were being heaped upon him in the army now. I think she has very high notions, and I thought I would just give her to understand that some people are as good as others. She thought Bright was splendid, and held him in her arms a long time, and kissed him, and rolled his hair over her fingers to make it curl, and taught him to call himself a *humbug*. He remembers it, the little monkey. But I never know when to stop talking. I must go. I have been away from my shop now so long that very likely the mice are all at play. My things are up-stairs in Miss Spicy's room. I can get them. Don't rise. I shall be in to see you often. Let me know a few days beforehand when you want your dresses made. Good-morning."

Spicy and I looked at each other after she was fairly on the sidewalk. We had a good many thoughts in common, which it was quite as wise to leave unsaid. Miss Terrapin was building her castles rather high, upon the strength of her importance to me in my daily walk and conversation. Yet, it was not so strange that she should after all, for I had the appearance and must have passed for a weak-minded woman, and my very dependence on her must have led her into

the adoption of her present theories. It would have been more pleasant not to have known how she was representing me and mine in the other houses where business took her, but some evils are necessary to our well-being.

"Who cares?" said Spicy, after a while. "Don't wear such a lugubrious face, my good sister."

"I was only thinking."

"So I supposed. But I would not think. I wish I could get a glimpse of Mrs. Vance."

"You probably will, as she must pass here very often if she lives so near us."

"How long did you say it was since she came to reside on this street?"

"I did not ask Miss Terrapin."

Days succeeded days in a round of pleasant occupations. Spicy was like a bird set free from a cage, and sang all the day long. I was happy to have her with me, and petted and laughed at her according to her moods. Some days she was in a severe fit of celibacy, and declared she should never marry. Men were too frivolous and exacting. No one worthy of the priceless treasure of her affections would ever be so fortunate as to discover their existence. Then out would come the picture of Fred Gilder-sleeve, and it would be wreathed with myrtle or forget-me-nots and hung on the knob of her bureau-drawer, or nearest the place where she happened to be sitting, and she would declare herself thawed out under the genial influence of his perpetual smile, and ask how many pairs of pillow-cases it would be necessary for her to embroider with a monogram before she should be ready for her wedding-trip!

We went out to see Aunt Minerva after a while, taking Bright with us. Phil was there, too, with his mother. A house full of guests in the country create a succession of enjoyments, and we allowed not a moment to go to waste. Spicy distinguished herself, as she had done on a previous occasion, by her horsemanship, and she grew more plump and rosy every day. Phil was always by her side, whether in the little dog-cart or on the pony's back, and many a long, sunny morning they idled away beside a brook at the foot of the garden.

"Look at them!" said Aunt Hatty, one day as we were standing on the piazza. "Phil has found out who is the prettiest girl in Illinois, without offence to any of my other pretty nieces and friends present."

"What is he doing? Holding her hand!" exclaimed Aunt Minerva, adjusting her spectacles—"Harriet, that is most too familiar for cousins. They must be spoke to about it."

Dinner was announced, and they did not come in directly. Uncle James went to the door and halloed to them. They did not move as rapidly after that as I have known people to do who were suffering with hunger.

"Hey, Phil, what you been about?" was Aunt Minerva's salutation, as he took his place at the table.

He dropped his eyes and appeared confused.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Uncle James. "I will stake a bushel of wheat that you've been picking clover-blossoms. None of that on my farm.—How is it, Miss Spicy?"

"I don't know, sir," and she blushed deeply.

"Oh, you don't! I thought you were there! But Phil sha'n't be teased in my house, nor you either. You are a nice little pair of thieves, although Phil is not so very little. I will see that Aunt Minerva don't disturb you; it is a good thing for relations to be relationy—ha, ha, ha!"

Phil prided himself upon his immobility and self-possession, and was gaining the ground which he had so unwarily lost. He bowed, admitting the joke, but showed very plainly that he did not think it was any great joke after all. Spicy did not smile, or otherwise indicate her appreciation of Uncle James's remarks. His humor was well known, as also his thorough good-nature, and it was hardly to be supposed that the young people had taken offence. But something had happened.

I questioned Spicy as soon as we were alone.

"I will tell you all there is to tell, Meddie, but pray don't ever mention it to a soul. I have piqued Phil. More than that, I think I have made him downright angry. You know I have always liked him, that is, I always found something to commend in him, although I have said so many times—and you have heard me say it—that he was fashioned out of very cheap material and inordinately vain. Since we have been here he has been trying to see how much foolish flattery I could stand, and he has found out. He has taken every opportunity to look straight into my eyes, and tell me I was *fair*, and all that, and I have looked it right back every time, and



told him he was *charming*. I thought it was a game I could play at as long as he could, but I never dreamed he was going to come the sentimental and make downright love!"

"And has he?"

"Yes, Meddie, this very morning; and I have crammed his heart all into those dainty gaiters he wears, and I dare say it aches, or he thinks it does."

"What did he say?"

"Every thing in the way of love-nonsense. How wishy-washy it all is, isn't it? Didn't it make you sick? I never shall get married if I have got to listen to such trash first!"

"The difference is whether you love or not."

"I can't understand it. Phil is a ninny! He might have known I did not care a pin for him! Do let us go back to Chicago to-morrow. I hate the country!"

We did not go on the morrow, because Phil strapped up his knapsack after breakfast and went to the depot. But a few days later we took the twenty-five-mile ride, and threw open our shutters once more.

Miss Terrapin discovered us before night. Spicy declared that she must have been hanging round in a balloon. Business was extremely dull with her. So many people had gone East, and to the mountains and lakes. Mrs. Vance was in Minnesota, and would not return until late in September. She had plenty of time to work for us. We had, however, much less for her to do than last year, for Spicy had become wiser since going to New York, and was determined on a limit to her baggage in the future.

"How long did you say Mrs. Vance had lived on Michigan Avenue?" I inquired.

"Several months, or—I really don't know how long she had been there before she called on me; but, judging from her conversation, I should say some time."

"You are about as definite as Mrs. Mudlaw, in giving a receipt for her potato-pudding," remarked Spicy.

"How was that?"

"Don't you know? Why, she said, 'If you wanted it large you must take more flour, or if you wanted it small you must take less.' And then about the butter, 'Some folks liked it short, and some folks didn't; if you liked it short you must put in more butter, but if you didn't like it short you must put in less.' And so with all the other ingredients, particularly the sweetening. And then as to the matter of baking, the time of keeping it in the oven must all depend upon the size of the pudding. It was so definite! And the pudding must have been so delicious when it was made right—that is, if you liked potato-pudding!"

Miss Terrapin laughed.

"Does Mrs. Vance live entirely alone?" I asked.

"Oh, no; she has an elderly lady, a Mrs. Chafferlee—sister, I think, or sister-in-law she must be, of Judge Shubill—with her. She always calls her 'Aunt Mary,' but I don't believe she is any relation of Mrs. Vance. Then Mrs. Chafferlee has a young son, a lad of nineteen or twenty, with her now."

"Call a young man of nineteen or twenty a *lad* do you?" exclaimed Spicy.

"He is not much more than a *lad* anyhow, although he is trying to raise a mustache, and wears a stove-pipe hat. He is at what I call the foolish age, neither man nor boy. Perhaps *lad* isn't the word to use, but a new one ought to be coined then."

"What else about Mrs. Vance?" asked Spicy.

"Nothing, only she is very charitable, has been round visiting all the different institutions, and they say she has donated something to each. She has an elegant carriage and drives in it every day."

I was notified, on one of the last days in August, that the house and grounds which I occupied had been sold, and the buyer paid his respects to me in the shape of a request that I should look out for another dwelling-place, and give him an opportunity to move away the old cottage, and erect three handsome white-stone edifices on its site. I at first objected decidedly, as I held a lease for months to come, but further interviews and a liberal compensation for the trouble at last reconciled me to the measure, but I was confident that I should never get so much attached to any other habitation. It really was a grievous trial to leave it. I regarded all its nooks and corners with daily-increasing affection, as the time drew near when I was to see them no more. Even the ghost-closet, which had been by all abandoned, put out a few expiring charms, and Spicy and I went in, and sat down on the steps, and talked over the thrilling incidents of which it had been the scene.

"And nobody has ever seen the ghost since that time, a year ago, when Miss Terrapin hung herself to oblige me?"

"No. The blue-room has hardly been used since. Miss Terrapin came a number of times in the autumn, on purpose, she said, to ransack for a solution of the mystery, but nothing ever came of it! Our last chance is gone, I suppose, now. If we move next week, the house will be rolled off at once, and, if it holds together to get there, will be rejuvenated, on a lot in the extreme southern portion of the city."

"Next week! Why, Meddie, to-day is Saturday, and you have not found a house, have you?"

"No, but Mr. Burton has volunteered to go to the north side with me on Monday, and he thinks I cannot fail to be suited."

The bell rang. In an instant, we were running at break-neck speed down the stairs, for it was Leonardus! Home for a fortnight! The great surprise of the season! Did not know he was coming until ten minutes before he started! Shouldn't have written if he had! Wanted to catch us amusing ourselves in his absence! Too bad we had got to move! But lucky he was on hand, for it would be just as well to buy a house now as any time. Would run over and see King, who had several for sale. Guessed there would be time before dinner. Would get a few *permits*, so that we could take an early look on Monday.

We were in a whirl of excitement from that moment until we were safely and comfortably quartered in a home of our own in North Chicago, not far from Rush Street, about three-fourths of a mile out. It was a corner two-story frame-house, with a French roof and cupola, square, and compact, and extreme-

ly modern. I had little or no personal trouble about the transit.

"A husband is such a handy thing to have round!" Spicy had said, and that explains every thing.

But it seemed almost cruel to keep him on the jump every moment of his stay among civilized people! I said so, more than once, and quoted my famous experience in the past, to prove my ability to lend a helping hand.

"You will have enough trouble yet before the war is over. Take it easy while you may," was how he silenced me.

The Dwight mansion was on rollers, and two-thirds of the way to the front gate, before we were out of it. Mr. Burton was anxious to get his houses up before the cold weather set in. A posse of men were laying the sewer, and another small army commenced digging the cellars that same morning. The original owner of the property came about nine o'clock, with artists and their instruments, to get a picture of the departing house. It was such a pity that they did not come sooner, before the foundation had been so uprooted and torn away! But they must have been people after my own heart, to have made the attempt at all. I had an affinity for them right away, and rendered them all the assistance in my power. I even used my eloquence to persuade the workmen to adjourn to the corner of Madison Street, and we suspended our own moving-operations for an hour. If I could have commanded the winds, I should have done still greater service, for the swaying of the branches spoiled one effort after another, until finally they were obliged to accept an impression, which fell far

short of their ideas and expectations. I stipulated for a copy.

Miss Terrapin came meanwhile and busied herself in scanning the division-line between the blue-room and the ghost-closet. As the house travelled, the closet remained and gaped in astonishment at the wonderful invention which had deprived it of its staff in old age.

"There certainly was never any way of getting out of that place except through the blue-room," she said, after standing on a table which had been tumbled out of the kitchen, and stretching her crane-like neck, until Spicy whispered to ask me if there was any danger of her head going up for want of ballast, and leaving her body behind!

The children from the streets, who had watched my pretty flowers all summer, with covetous eyes through the cracks in the fence, swarmed into the yard as the gates no longer swung on their hinges, and stripped it of its last beauty. A few days afterward, when I chanced that way, there was not a landmark left. Three cellars were completed, piles of brick and white marble covered the remaining lots, which had grown such rare shrubs and beautiful trees, and the hedge and the currant-bushes and the grape-arbor had disappeared. Thus passeth away the things of this world!

Leonardus found some friends going on to New York about the time that Miss Gilbert's school opened, and we placed Spicy under their charge.

It was the same day that Leonardus himself set out to join his command. My trials always came double.

"It is so fortunate for you that they do!" Spicy said. "Here are two now, and you will get over them both at once."

Bright felt strange in the new house, and teased incessantly, to be "tooked 'ome." I filled the nursery with toys, and did my best to make him happy and contented. The nurse was good and kind to him, but she had no tact or ingenuity whereby to devise ways and means to divert and entertain the little fellow. If he cried for the looking-glass, she brought him to me. If he got angry, and struck her over the head, she brought him to me. If he was sick or sleepy, it was all the same, she brought him to me—I must take the brunt. I made it a point to have her keep him in the open air as much as possible. She took him to walk in pleasant weather, and when it rained she drew him in his little carriage. Coming in, one afternoon, he ran to me, saying:

"Me humbug! me humbug!"

"Ah! what has reminded you of that?"

"Me humbug! me humbug!"

"Who has he seen, since he went out?" I asked of the nurse.

"Nobody, ma'am, but a lady in a carriage."

"Did she speak to him?"

"Yes 'em. She stopped by the sidewalk, and asked me to hand him to her a moment, and when it looked like rain she said she might as well drive round to where we lived, for we might get caught if we were very long on the way."

"And did she take you in also?"

"Yes 'em. I said I could walk, but she told me quite sharp-like, though it

was soft-spoken, that nurses never should let babies out of their sight with strangers, so I got in."

"How did she look?"

"Like a very nice lady. I don't think I ever saw a nicer lady."

"What did she say to Bright?"

"Oh, she held him on her lap, and asked him to tell her his name, and to kiss her, and some other things. I think she played with him a little, and called him a *humbug*. She told me that I must take good care of him."

"Is that all? Tell me every word."

"It is all I can think of. Oh, I believe she said Miss Terrapin brought him to see her once, last spring, and that he had grown very much since then."

"Mrs. Vance! It was Mrs. Vance!" I said to myself.

I wished I could see her. Perhaps the old mistrust in regard to her identity with Nursy Brown took possession of me for a brief moment; but, if so, I put it away. It could not be possible! Leonardus had set my mind at rest there, not only a year ago when he first told me Ida Everett's sad history, but last week when Spicy and I had mooted the subject again, and tried her case in our self-appointed court.

"No woman of Ida Everett's culture was ever equal to the voluntary withdrawal of herself from every past association without some compensating adjunct. She has remained concealed most effectually from the world, but she could no more have existed in such a servitude as Nurey Brown walled about her, than my wifey here, and what would be her success, think you, in such an undertaking?" were his closing arguments.

They had weight with me for several reasons—principally because men are supposed to know every thing—and Leonardus had seen Mrs. Vance while I had not.

Thinking it over and over, and revolving all the attendant circumstances in my mind until my brain was excited so that I could not sleep through the long hours of the night that followed, I determined upon paying a visit to Mrs. Vance, ostensibly to thank her for the interest she had manifested in my baby, but really to satisfy an aching curiosity to behold her face, which clamored, refusing to be dismissed.

At two o'clock the next afternoon, I found myself sitting in Mrs. Vance's parlor, and the servant had taken her my card.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### MRS. BELMORE VISITS MRS. VANCE.

My heart beat tumultuously. Every moment seemed an age. I scarcely observed the appointments of the room, which were of rare elegance, so intent was I upon the main purpose of my visit. I heard a rustle on the stairs! Ah, coming?—no, it was the servant. She stopped to say that Mrs. Vance would be down presently. Waiting, perhaps, to acquire self-control before appearing in my presence. No, no, I do not suspect her of being other than she is. But something was wrong with me, else why was I there, with my blood all agog? My restless eagerness was unlike myself. I had almost reached the limits of my endurance, when I heard her footstep on

the stairs, and in another instant she was holding one of my hands between both of hers, and saying, with a warmth of feeling not often made manifest by strangers:

"I am very, very glad to see you, Mrs. Belmore."

Her manner was simple and direct. She drew a large chair in front of me, and, before I could speak of my baby, she introduced the subject:

"Miss Terrapin prepared us to be acquainted months ago through your darling little boy, and I have been hoping, ever since then, that this pleasure might be vouchsafed me."

Her face, which was entirely colorless, did not strike me at first as wholly pleasing in repose, but it was singularly beautiful when animated in conversation. An inscrutable reticence, which might baffle the keenest observation when she was silent, disappeared and melted in the glow of pleasure which lit up every feature while she talked. She was a woman to stir and thrill and entrance the soul, to give stimulus to the intellectual nature, to rouse passionate tenderness in the heart. She chatted free and unconstrained upon the various topics which were agitating the city and country. Speaking of the approaching Sanitary Fair, she regretted her inability to take an active part in it, as it was her desire to live as secluded as possible, but hoped she should be able to donate her mite for the good of the soldiers. I was intoxicated with her sweet earnestness, and felt a new, strange bond beginning to tighten around me as natural and inevitable as any other fact in Nature.

Her eyes, of which I had heard so

much, were shining upon me with a transparent truthfulness in which I felt that I could rest. They were more than beautiful. Were they blue? I suppose so. Grandison Gildersleeve wrote to Helen that they were blue, and Leonardus had made the same assertion. But I would not like to have been placed upon the witness-stand and compelled to take my oath on the subject. I only saw a lovely woman, a very lovely woman, of an intense and susceptible nature, looking calmly from them through the vista of years which had been crowded with the most painful experiences. I did not think about their color, I simply basked in their light. Had I ever seen them before? I felt like a culprit to have asked myself that question. I had seen some very like them. None of that fire and life, however—would she pause in her conversation and let me have one more glimpse of her face in repose? No. She was too well-bred to give a guest an opportunity of studying the pattern of her carpet.

I tarried longer than the circumstances warranted to debate that old question to myself. But I arrived at no distinct conclusion. There was much in the voice and manner, as well as in the outline of features, that belonged to Nursy Brown. But, during the whole period of her life under my roof, I had never seen the upper part of her face but once. I remembered my impressions at the time, but is it possible to carry such a thing in one's mind and dare to assert an important opinion after so long an interval? How frequent are cases of mistaken identity! A lady-friend of mine once spoke to a gentleman

in the street whom she took for her own brother, and was followed home and subjected to an infinite amount of annoyance in consequence. Mrs. Vance betrayed no consciousness of acting a part, was handsomely though plainly dressed; her coiffure was elaborate, her style unquestionable, and I found myself upon leaving the house disabused of many of the theories with which I had entered it.

I urged her to visit me often. She said it would give her great happiness if I would allow her to come without ceremony, as she was not paying visits, and had declined all the courtesies of society since she came to Chicago.

"How long have you resided here?" I had the courage to inquire.

"In this house but a few months, in Chicago over two years."

We were standing by the parlor-door, our hands clasped, and looking directly in each other's faces when she made that remark.

"She is no more Nursy Brown than I am!" was my final decision, and much that occurred afterward tended to confirm me in that belief.

Miss Terrapin was delighted when she heard that I had called upon Mrs. Vance.

"It will be so pleasant for her to have you for a friend!" she said.

How kindly she always put things! I could imagine her making the same remark to Mrs. Vance, and with much better grace. It was certainly I who would reap the greatest advantage from an intimate friendship, if indeed such should be the result. I longed for some one, just such a one, to fill a niche in my heart, hitherto vacant. For five years

my husband had been my all in all, and until the breaking out of the rebellion our house had been one of the pleasant centres of a charming social circle, in the atmosphere of which we had expanded and brightened together. But he was away. My sister was away. I had ceased to recognize the right of society to demand any portion of my time while our husbands and friends were facing the cannon's mouth, and was comparatively alone in the din and bustle of a great city. I had needs. A woman, graceful, adorned, and tender with womanliness, could supply them. I had unwittingly found her.

Mrs. Vance returned my call within the week. It was early one morning, and she proposed a drive out on the road to Evanston. Bright must go too, and she insisted upon holding him in her arms. Near the entrance to the old cemetery she paused, and, asking me to excuse her, disappeared in one of the greenhouses for a few minutes. When I got home, a charming bouquet of flowers on my library-table explained her errand.

It was about that time that the Sanitary Fair became the theme of all tongues, and attracted the attention of the whole loyal North. Such a *furor* of benevolence had never been known! Men, women, and children, corporations and business firms, religious societies and political organizations, all vied with one another enthusiastically as to who should do the most, for the proceeds were to be devoted to the sick and wounded of the Southwestern hospitals, and what true heart could resist the appeal? The press lent its generous and

persistent aid, the rich gave of their abundance, and the poor withheld not from giving because of their poverty. The very air seemed magnetized with grand purposes and contagious generosity.

The Fair had been projected in the minds of two ladies, who had on several occasions visited the armies at the South, and seen with their own eyes what an immense amount of supplies were necessary to the recovery and comfort of the brave invalids and wounded men filling our military hospitals. If, by enlisting the people of the Northwest, they could raise ten thousand dollars, they believed it worth the effort. But they little dreamed how greatly it was to outgrow all their original calculations!

It was held on the last week in October and the first week in November, in Bryan Hall, which was transformed into a bazaar, rivalling those of the Orient in gorgeousness and bewildering beauty. A temporary structure was erected in the rear for the reception of the more bulky machinery, farmers' implements, etc., which were contributed. The Supervisors' Hall in the court-house was devoted to art and trophies, and a *curiosity-shop* it was indeed. A large hall in McVickar's Building was converted into a gallery of paintings, and the beautiful and rare works which were collected surprised those who had not kept pace with the growth of Chicago in culture and refinement. Many of the Chicago artists generously painted pictures for the occasion, and afterward donated them, and they were sold for good prices. Metropolitan Hall was devoted exclusively to evening entertainments. Its decorations

were such that it lighted up brilliantly. Festoons of red, white, and blue, glittering with gold stars, depended from the gallery; every iron column was fluted with white and red; while around the gallery were arranged mottoes expressive of faith in God, devotion to the country, and undying interest in her brave defenders. The proscenium was arranged with fluted decorations and festoons of national colors. At either side of the stage were busts of President Lincoln and Webster, while over the curtain hovered the national eagle, resting on a shield, grasping the stars and stripes in the talons of one foot, and the arrowy lightnings with the other. And every evening this spacious hall was crowded to its utmost capacity—concerts, tableaux, and lectures, alternating according to the pleasure of the caterer.

The Fair was opened by an inaugural procession which brought all the machinery of the great city to a stand-still. The day cannot be forgotten. Such a sight the West never saw before upon any occasion. Chicago was a vast theatre of wonders! From the earliest dawn of day the streets were thronged with people. Citizens hurried excitedly to and fro, and country-women with children, country-wagons with flags and banners, horsemen with colors tied to their bridles, chariots, civic orders, and military companies, horse and foot, drums beating, bands of music playing, and the roar of multitudinous voices in the streets, all combined to render it one of the most magnificent spectacles of the age! The house-tops were filled, and every pathway so jammed with human bodies that it was with great difficulty

that the procession, when formed, could make any headway. Such enthusiasm as accompanied it has rarely been witnessed. The people seemed to overflow with loyalty. Many of them had been silent till now, but their love for the old flag could no longer be hidden under a bushel. There was mighty eloquence in that sublime display.

On the court-house steps those who could get near enough listened to several speeches, and a salute of thirty-four guns, and then the multitude surged like tidal-waves toward the halls of the Fair.

The railroads ran excursion-trains each day, from different parts of the country, which brought crowds of large-hearted, loyal, whole-souled country-people, and from eight o'clock in the morning until ten at night there was no apparent diminution in the number of visitors during the whole progress of the Fair.

Dinners were one of its greatest features. Lower Bryan Hall was fitted up for that purpose. Dinners had for a long time been a feature of Chicago fairs. The materials for them were furnished gratuitously by the ladies of the city. Their names were recorded, as also the articles they would furnish, and the days when they would furnish them. Then the aggregate supply for each day could be ascertained. So many cooked turkeys, so many pieces of roast-beef, so many ducks, so many chickens, so many pies, so many puddings, so many gallons of milk, so many pounds of coffee, so many oysters, so many dishes of mashed potatoes, and other smoking-hot vegetables, etc. If the amount pledged was not sufficient, the dinner committee



could supply deficiencies. By some mystery of the *cuisine*, which it is not my province to divulge, from Iowa, Wisconsin, and other States, edibles came in ready for the table as hot as if they had just made their *début* from the bake-pan!

From one to two thousand gentlemen who usually lunched at a restaurant down-town, dined each day at the Fair, as elegantly and comfortably as if at their own homes. Six ladies took charge of each table through the entire two weeks. Two of them were to preside daily, one to pour the tea and coffee, and the other to entertain and supervise. They were the wives of Congressmen, professional men, editors, merchants, bankers, and millionnaires—none were above serving for the soldiers. Each lady furnished table-linen and silver for her table, and decorated it as her taste suggested. The table-waiters were the young ladies from the best families. They were—like the ladies who presided—attired in pretty white caps and aprons, trimmed and worn to suit the varied styles of the wearers. It was a novel scene!—the matrons behind their urns receiving all who came to their tables as they would honor guests in their own home—the graceful girls in their pretty uniforms darting hither and thither—the continual incoming of fresh trays, and baskets, and pails, laden with viands—the long line of carvers, one for each variety of meats, who had never before donned the white apron and knife of the department—and the crowds who would dine in this hall if they had to wait for hours for a place! It was animated, unusual, picturesque; a department which required great executive skill in its man-

agement, and none was more popular or successful.

I resisted the pressure upon my heart and purse strings until both gave way, and I was precipitated into this pandemonium of the epicures. "If I must work in the Fair, I choose the dining-hall," I had incautiously remarked to one of the managers early in the autumn, and consequently I was enrolled for duty.

"I shall not attend the Fair, but allow me to furnish the decorations, the silver, the fruit, and the flowers for your table," said Mrs. Vance.

I accepted her offer gladly, for my stock would make but a poor show. It was all there, ready for use, on that famous Monday morning. An elegant, solid service, rare and costly—the most elegant and rare and costly that graced the Fair. And such flowers as came fresh every morning!—the gems of Chicago greenhouses—and her fruit was the choicest, and the rarest, and the ripest, that the market afforded. My table thus was the great centre of attraction. Distinguished parties were all escorted to it, and when the Governor's dinner came off it was the one selected for their special entertainment.

I did not see Mrs. Vance during the whole two weeks of the Fair, but I felt her presence continually. Sometimes Miss Terrapin hovered round with commissions for her.

"Mrs. Vance has seen by the papers that there are some very beautiful specimens of gypsum-work from Grand Rapids. Will you tell me where to find them?" Or: "Mrs. Vance has heard that from Portland are some exquisite

*Alga*, which she would like to purchase." Or: "I must hurry, for I have promised to take Mrs. Vance some of the Indian-work from Green Bay—and then I am to go to the court-house to select some minerals."

Volk, the sculptor, was intrusted with the choice of some fine pictures for her, through my recommendation, and she sent money to me in several instances to drop round where there were to be articles raffled off. She took Bright to drive nearly every pleasant day, and kept my parlors as cheerfully adorned with flowers as my table at Bryan Hall.

The great pioneer of all the Sanitary Fairs which honored our country, and encouraged the worn veterans on the battle-fields, came to an end on Saturday, November 7th, by the giving of a sumptuous dinner to all the soldiers in Camp Douglas, the Marine Hospital and City Hospital, and the Soldiers' Home; and Anna Dickinson uttered the words of cheer and praise and kindly remembrance, that dilated the heart and trembled on the lip of every woman who had been in attendance on the Fair. They were a bronzed, scarred, emaciated, halt, blind, deaf, crippled, skeleton corps; some without arms, some without legs, some swinging themselves painfully on crutches, and some leaning on those stronger than themselves for support, all bearing the touching evidence of having suffered for their country. A more elegantly-laid table was never seen. The hall had been redecorated, and flags and handkerchiefs waved, and the band—the best band in the city—welcomed them with "Brave Boys are they."

In the preparations, which had sent

the ladies running hither and thither for the best their resources afforded, my Lady Bountiful had made me her almoner in the distribution of game, and jellies, and ices, for the whole four hundred. I begged of her in a little note, written on a scrap of tissue-paper pressed up against the coffee-urn, to come and see our guests assembled; but she had reasons of her own for declining, and my faith in her ability to judge for herself was sufficient to have silenced any queries which might have arisen in my mind as to the wherefore.

The proceeds of the Fair swelled to over one hundred thousand dollars! And the world wondered! So did the business men of Chicago, who had prognosticated failure, and laughed when the ladies first scattered their circulars and talked of a net profit of ten thousand dollars.

Weary and worn with my arduous labors, I gave myself up to perfect rest for a season. Miss Terrapin advised me to get my winter dresses, for she should be so hurried in December. But I allowed the days to glide away, one after another, without giving the matter any serious attention. The quiet of my little home was so enticing, that I had little or no disposition to go out. Besides, Rush-Street bridge had fallen one day under the weight of a drove of cattle, and I could not get to Lake Street without a disagreeable long *détour* by the way of Clark-Street bridge. The weather was cold, rendering true, literally true, the lines—

"No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,

No comfortable feel, in any member;

No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees;

No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds, No-ven-ber."

I did not need any thing new while I stayed at home, and I never was fond of shopping.

Miss Terrapin said I reminded her of the old man who was found one rainy day curled up in the only dry spot in his house. When asked why he did not mend his roof, he said that "it rained so that he couldn't." "But, why don't you mend it when the sun shines?" "Because it don't need mending then."

I made the application, but did not supply my dress-maker with work. Time enough, I thought, although my garments of soft wool, so important in such a climate, were far from adequate to my necessities.

"It is a good thing to have a journey in prospect once in a while, when one is too lazy to attend to one's wardrobe without a stimulus," I said, one day, laughing.

"You may have a summons to go somewhere yet, before the winter is over," Miss Terrapin replied.

"Perhaps. But, if I should, there is my old black silk always at hand, like frost on a winter morning."

I little dreamed how soon I should be driven to the black silk, though; nor with what benumbed bitterness I should recall the words so lightly spoken!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### STARTLING NEWS.

"No letter from my sister Spicy this week!" I said to Mrs. Vance, one morning as she sat by my library-fire in her velvet mantle, which revealed little

fine white-lace ruffles at the throat and wrists.

"I hope it don't give you special anxiety," she replied.

"No, hardly. But Spicy is very precise in the fulfilment of her obligations. I fancied she was not well, by the tenor of her last. She is ambitious, and fully determined to stand high in her class, and sometimes I fear she studies harder than is good for her. The tone of her letters has been very different this year from what they were last."

I was interrupted by the postman himself. But the letter was not from Spicy! It was post-marked New York, however. I broke it open and started with alarm! Spicy was ill, quite ill; the physician had requested them to send for me. It might not prove serious, but I had better come immediately.

"Oh, oh!" I exclaimed.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Vance.

I threw the letter into her lap, and started to my feet, wringing my hands.

"Do read it."

"Of course you must go," she said, quietly.

"Oh, my darling! Why did they not telegraph?"

"From the fact of their writing instead of telegraphing, I think you may augur well. I have no doubt they have sent for you as early as seemed best. Don't allow yourself to be needlessly agitated. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, only come and see Bright sometimes. Or if you will call on your way home, and send Miss Terrapin here, it will save me a journey to Lake Street."

"Certainly. You will take the even-

ing train, I suppose, and I will send my carriage to transport you to the depot."

"Don't give yourself that trouble."

"I shall; and more, I shall go with you to the cars. I wish I might make myself useful in some other way."

I looked into her lovely face—

"And felt how much suffering with years must have  
past,  
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last."

There was no idle caprice, no mere entanglement of senses between two unemployed natures that was the groundwork of the affection which had sprung up between us, but a subtle harmony, organic, spiritual and intellectual. We were as it were under a spell, and each sympathized in the other's pain. Her words, which always seemed to mean more than words, strengthened me.

I had several hours before me, and I looked after my household and business affairs with a calmness that surprised even myself, considering how I was racked with anxiety. Miss Terrapin came, and promised to spend her nights in my house during my absence. Mrs. Vance's carriage was at my door promptly in time for the train, and she was there herself to cheer and uphold me, and infuse new vigor into my flagging spirits.

It was a journey that seemed of interminable length. The agonizing suspense was more than human nature could bear—so I thought then; but I have learned since, and recently, that its tension is beyond measurement.

I sent a telegram from Buffalo, but the train started before the answer came. With sharpened senses from overwrought

emotions, I ran my eye up and down the brown-stone front while the carriage was coming to a halt in front of Miss Gilbert's school, and read—nothing. Inner life in large cities does not hang out its banners.

"How is Miss Merriman?" I asked, breathlessly, of the servant who opened the door.

"I don't know, ma'am. Walk in the parlor. Who shall I say has called?"

"Let me run up to Miss Merriman's room."

"No, ma'am. I will call Miss Gilbert first. Will you send your name?"

I pulled a card from my *porte-monnaie* petulantly, gave it to the servant and walked rapidly up and down the parlor, while she stopped and read it on the stairs, turned it over, showed it to Katy—the other chamber-maid, whom she met in the second hall—and took time to tell her that "she guessed the lady couldn't be any great shakes, coming so early in the morning and being in such a tearing hurry!"

Miss Gilbert was engaged for a few minutes, so that, taking it all together, I was tortured into a state of mind bordering on frenzy. When she came she apologized for the message having been sent to me in the way it was. One of her teachers had written the letter, and had been expressly directed to ask me if it would be convenient for me to come on immediately, but to assure me at the same time that there was no danger. My telegram sent from Buffalo had induced her to make inquiries, and she regretted exceedingly that I had been needlessly alarmed. Spicy was sick, quite sick, with a low fever, caused, she thought,

by some nervous excitement: but she had no apprehensions of any danger.

I found her looking very sweet, eyes bright and cheeks pink. She threw both arms about my neck, and held me for a minute when I stooped to kiss her.

"How foolish for them to have given you this journey!" she said. "I shall be well in a few days."

"You are glad to see me?"

"What a question! Yes, indeed!"

"Did you think I would come?"

"Oh, yes, I knew it. But it was unnecessary. I have good care. The school-nurse is with me nearly every moment. Miss Gilbert comes very often, and the girls stand ready to do any thing and every thing. I am not very sick, as you will soon discover."

I was not satisfied in regard to that until I had held a consultation with the old physician.

"I am puzzled with her case," he said. "There seems to be nothing out of order in her body, and she denies any trouble on her mind. Perhaps you will be able to give me the diagnosis of her disease, after a few days' companionship."

She was certainly weak, for she slept all the evening while I sat looking in her face, but took her broth with a great relish at ten o'clock. She left a little in the bottom of the cup, and asked me to save it for her, as she might want it in the middle of the night.

"Cover it up with this," she said, producing something from under her pillow, and I laughed loud enough to have waked the seven sleepers in the next room, as I took in my hand the old likeness of Fred Gildersleeve.

"What has become of your two-dollar man?" I asked, after my mirth had subsided.

"Don't speak of him! O Meddie!"

"Why? What now?"

"I am so angry with myself."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing!—and that is just what's the matter."

"Do explain!"

"I don't feel like it; besides, the doctor says I must rest quietly at night."

"Very well. I am here to see that the doctor's orders are obeyed, so we will have our talk to-morrow."

She closed her eyes and lay perfectly still for a few moments. Suddenly she became restless, and asked for a drink of water. Then she turned her matted back-hair toward me, and her fingers were busy picking at the blankets. Something evidently troubled her. But what?

"Meddie, are you going to sit up all night?"

The voice seemed miles away, and the classic little head did not turn.

"No; I shall lie down after a while. I want to see you asleep first."

Silence again, and her watch on the table ticked out twenty-five minutes.

"Meddie, shall you be going down-street for any thing within a day or two?"

"Why, darling?"

"I want you to do a favor for me."

"What is it?"

"Please go to my writing-desk, and in the corner, this way, you will find something folded in a white paper marked '*Sacred*.' There!—yes, that is it."

I took it to her.

"You keep it, Meddie; I don't want to see it. When you are out, just stop at the missionary-office, and donate it to the heathen."

I opened the little parcel and there was a two-dollar bill!

"A new method of investment," I remarked, with a smile which she did not see.

"Don't tantalize me. You would not, if you knew all. I suppose I sha'n't have any peace of mind until I tell you. It has got to come, and I may as well relieve myself first as last. But I do feel as if I should like to hide under a cabbage-leaf for the rest of my natural life! Listen, Meddie! I have seen Mr. Hiddledahlgreen and talked with him for several minutes, and had that money in my pocket, and never once thought to offer it to him!"

"How did it happen?"

"We were at the Academy of Design, under the charge of Miss Pluss, our drawing-teacher, who never knows whether she is in the body or out when she gets in front of a good painting, and that accounts for my having an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with a gentleman. I was examining a marble bust which interested no one else, and I was left quite alone, when all at once he was standing by me, and took my hand just as he did that time in the restaurant, and said he was very glad of the opportunity of saying 'good-by' to me, for he was going to Europe to be gone several years; that he had thought seriously of calling, but was aware of Miss Gilbert's strict rules, and presumed he should not be allowed to see me if he did; asked

me when I was going to graduate, even to the date of our commencement-exercises, and if I expected to return to Chicago immediately after, and ever so much more. And all that time he was holding my hand, and pretty near squeezing it, to remind me of my little obligation, no doubt, and it never once came into my stupid head. He's gone, and my last chance is gone of ever paying the debt, so I want to get rid of the two dollars."

I laughed, but yet I caressed and comforted her, and promised to bury the dreadful bank-note in the Potter's Field of benevolence, and begged her to think how much good it was going to do some poor Feejee, and when she tried to speak I put my hand over her mouth and was rewarded at last by the soft, even breathing that was an assurance of welcome sleep.

She was better the next day. I took the first opportunity of carrying out her wishes, and she thanked me with an earnestness that the occasion hardly warranted. Her complexion was of that soft, pale tint with a slight undertone of brown in it, which kindles into brilliancy under excitement, and her soul all seemed on the surface when she exclaimed:

"I am so much obliged to you, Meddie!"

She improved rapidly, and was soon able to sit up for an hour at a time. The holiday vacation had commenced, and Miss Gilbert insisted upon our occupying a more cheerful room on the second floor. Spicy was pensive and drooped. I told her stories and read to her, and used every means to give tone and direction to her sick mind. Sometimes, even after she was able to walk about

the room, I was haunted with the apprehension that she was going to die. Her manner toward me was ineffably tender, almost pathetic, and I often found her in tears. Yet her appetite had returned, and her general health seemed restored.

She agreed with us all that I must get to my home in Chicago before New-Year's Day, and was so self-contained at the last, that I was almost piqued to have her show so little feeling.

"The idea of travelling at this season of the year in a black silk!" she said. "You will certainly freeze without an extra shawl! Do take mine!"

I declined her offer, for I thought I should get along very well with my furs and water-proof, as the cars were usually warm.

The first part of my journey was devoid of incident. I passed over the Great Western Railway, arriving in Detroit on Thursday morning, the last day of 1863. It was snowing slightly as we left the depot, and the storm continued through the day. We were behind time at Marshall; I think it was three o'clock when we got there, or when we left there, I don't remember which, for my hands were too numb to get at my watch, and I depended upon what I heard people saying around me. It was six o'clock when we stopped at Niles, and some gentlemen remarked that the storm was increasing in violence and the snow in volume very fast. Some one said it was doubtful whether we reached Chicago before midnight. I noticed that we were a long time in starting, as if the engine moved with difficulty. At the next station, and the next, the same trouble was apparent. The wind was

fast becoming a gale. It whistled and shrieked around the windows, and people gathered near the fire in the centre of the car. We were near New Buffalo, when a shrill whistle signalled, "Down with the brakes!" and the train stopped. Passengers rushed out, and came back to tell the rest that the ominous and imperative red-light was in the path! Later, they discovered that it was a freight-train blocked in by the snow, and we could neither move backward nor forward. A message was sent on to the next station for an engine, and in the course of two hours we were in motion once more. But our progress was painfully slow. I heard the passengers wishing each other "A happy New-Year," and soon we were immovable and some one announced that engines had been dispatched to Chicago for help.

"Where are we?" I ventured to ask of my next neighbor.

"Close by the crossing of the Michigan Southern Railroad," replied the proprietor of one of the finest, longest, silkiest white beards I ever saw, and who sat on the opposite side of the aisle.

It was getting very cold. I sighed audibly, in remembrance of wasted opportunities and woollen goods. I had not been so thinly clad in winter-time for years. What a godsend that shawl of Spicy's would have been!

The wood provided for our stove was wet or green, or both, and everybody was in a shiver. The wind howled across the low prairie, and penetrated every crack and crevice, and little snow-drifts piled in about the windows, and swept across our necks and shoulders. The shiver soon became pain in feet and

arms and hands, and the fuel was fast disappearing.

"What shall we do?" more than one voice asked with a shudder.

"The fences!" A happy suggestion, and active men secured a saw, took turns in its use, and fed the hungry stove. Soon the flames roared up the pipe, and smoke was discovered about the roof of the car. That would never do! Rather suffer the cold with shelter, than be turned carless into that raging storm on the bleak prairie!

"Be careful! be careful!" shouted the conductor. "If one car gets on fire, I cannot save the train!"

One car was on fire! And speechless with terror we watched the herculean efforts of brave men to extinguish it, which they did; but it was no longer tenable, and its living freight was scattered through the other cars. I gave up my seat to a gentleman who was bringing a lady in, in his arms, and took one farther forward.

The cold grew colder. The winds howled louder. The frost pierced to the quick like sharp needles. Those who had lunch-baskets that were not empty, distributed their remaining contents among the invalids and children. The gentlemen alternated between the baggage-car and the fire, and between the fence and the baggage-car, and the several fires. What had become of the engine sent for aid? Chicago was before our very eyes, and must we perish? The sun was up, shedding no warmth, not even showing his face, or giving us a ray of hope or comfort. An army of fiends must have been let loose in the atmosphere!

It was about noon when a Michigan

Southern train, drawn by three engines, appeared in sight. It was immediately signalled, stopped, and arrangements made for the transfer of the chilled passengers from our train to it. The snow was deep, huge drifts banked in every direction, and we must traverse it a distance of three hundred yards, in the face of a snow-tempest and frost-laden wind, which was sweeping over us like a storm of grape! But we could be taken to the city, if we could immediately reach the Southern train. Not a moment for delay, or the engines might freeze immovable. Cold as it was in our car, those who had not had occasion to expose themselves to the storm previously knew little of the ordeal through which they must pass to reach the other train.

"Don't a man of you start without taking a woman or child under your care!" shouted a full, rich, deep voice; and, turning quickly, I saw the gentleman for whom I had resigned my seat in the night, swinging his hat with a gesture of command.

In an instant he had picked up his own charge, thrown the corner of her cloak over her face, and plunged into the fearful storm. Men, women, and children followed his example. Strong men fell by the way, frail women wallowed and struggled, and were dragged to the cars insensible, and children were rescued half-frozen. I waited a little, partly to see how others succeeded, but more from shrinking dread of the perilous undertaking; and then the other terror, lest I should be left behind and alone, took possession of me and forced me to exertion. I leaped into the snow, and right by my side leaped the man with



the white beard, and tried to help me. He had been buttoning up his coat and tying up his ears and face, while I had been summoning my courage. But my blood was the younger of the two. I got in advance of him; the snow blinded me—I tried to go sidewise, and backward—I fell down, plunging my arms into the snow to my shoulders—rose again—advanced a little—stumbled—lost my muff and my veil—and at last yielded to my fate with one long, hopeless look at the welcome haven so near and yet so far from me.

I was half-buried in the snow when I was grasped by strong hands and swiftly borne to the car. I heard the melodious voice, which had rung in my ears once before, say to the lady who received me from his arms, and commenced chafing my face with snow:

"Excuse me, that old gentleman has fallen, and I must try and help him."

Children were crying, women were moaning, and men were rushing out for snow with which to extract frost from feet and hands, forgetting their own frozen faces until made conscious of it by the painful tingling which follows neglect. White noses, ears, faces, and hands, marked nearly every one of the Central passengers, and many of the Southern who had nobly aided in the transfer. The ladies on the latter train received the helpless and injured, and converted the cars into a temporary hospital. Mothers were fainting and asking for their children, and strong men hardly were able to suppress cries of physical agony.

And the engine shrieked, and then, as if madly, moved on. Hope of early relief inspired us all with fortitude.

Three miles more, and the train suddenly stopped. Two Rock Island engines were frozen up on the track.

"Well, Dr. Gildersleeve, what is the prospect?" asked a voice near me, as a rush of cold air and a bang of the car-door proclaimed that some one was coming in.

"The engineer says that seventy-five engines could not draw us to town!" was the reply.

I could not turn my head, for my face was packed with snow, and some one was chafing my hands and arms. But he came along in front of me. I knew I could not be mistaken. It was the gentleman to whom I owed my life.

"Ah, Mrs. Belmore! I thought I recognized you, but was not certain," he said. "I dined at your table several times during the Fair."

I did remember! It all came to me! I had been attracted by his fine face and courtly bearing, and had asked his name, but none of the ladies knew. They thought he was an editor, or at least a man of some literary distinction, by the deference that was shown him by such gentlemen as Mayor Montrose and Rev. Dr. Montague, who met him there.

So his name was Gildersleeve!—not Fred—too many years and too much dignity resting on his shoulders. But Ida Everett's quondam lover, perchance! And a noble specimen of God's handiwork he was indeed! The very car seemed full of him, he emanated so much hope and cheer and good-nature.

"We must shake our lunch-baskets once more, and make the best of our scanty bill-of-fare," he said, in reply to the pitiful query of a feeble old woman,

as to whether we should be able to get any thing to eat before morning.

A sharp pain in my stomach reminded me that I had not tasted a morsel for more than twenty-four hours. Must we die of starvation and cold, in full view of the turrets and spires of luxurious Chicago! Was there no one among us who could face the storm and bring aid?

I saw the question answered a few moments later. More than ten stalwart men, wrapped to their eyes, undertook to reach a house that seemed not over three-fourths of a mile distant, and each turned back to save himself. It could not be done!

Children screamed with pain and hunger. Women were exhausted with fasting, fright, and frost. Men were discussing the probable failure of fuel, and the cautious of both sexes were constantly warning the fire-tenders with pictures of burning-cars and quick destruction.

"There is wood and coal on yonder Rock Island engines. We must get it or freeze," said Dr. Gildersleeve, and gentlemen unused to exposure, who had never handled an axe, or carried a burden, followed him into the storm and worked like heroes. But they could not exercise in the terribly exhaustive wind but a few minutes at a time, and volunteers were reënlisted again and again, before the needed supply for the night was secured.

He was shaking the snow from his hair, and pressing his hands to his whitened ears, when the friend who had addressed him before asked for his wife.

"She is comfortable—more so than most of the ladies. We were better provided for cold than travellers usually are.

as our experience last year in getting snowed in on a Western train was a severe stricture on improvidence."

I roused myself enough to make kindly inquiries, and learned that his wife was a confirmed invalid. He was just bringing her home from an Eastern cure, where she had been for several months. And, although I did not see her, I learned that she was warmly tucked in an improvised bed in the next car, and that her name was—HELEN!

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RESCUE.

MEANWHILE the conductor of the train and two loyal friends had breasted the tempest, determined to save the passengers or die in the attempt. It was not quite dark when they reached the Tremont, so frozen that they could scarcely be recognized by their nearest kin. The news which they communicated flew like wildfire from one hotel to another. The cooked meats that were being carved for their dinners were hastily packed, as also chickens and game, and sandwiched tongue, and turkey, and jellies, and wines; and four large sleighs were filled and manned; but one only of the three who had brought the sad intelligence of perishing humanity, was able to return as a guide to the ill-fated train. The other two were crippled for years.

And but one only of the four sleighs reached its destination. The drivers of the others lost their way, were blinded by the storm, and finally returned

whence they came with frozen feet and hands and faces.

What a thrilling announcement! The door of our car opened, and a muffled figure as white as the storm he seemed to represent, entered and hoarsely shouted:

"Provisions for the multitude! A sleighful from the city!"

Surprise, gratitude, and admiration, echoed from the heart of every one who had realized our danger. We ate, and wondered, and silently thanked the men who had dared so much for our salvation.

Fires were lighted at the rear of the cars as a beacon to the other sleighs, but they came not. How any human being could have lived to ride in the face of such a storm was a matter of astonishment to all.

The sleigh which had arrived, out of mercy to the horses, set out for Chicago as quickly as unladen, and one or two ladies, who would not be persuaded to the contrary, went in it. But we learned afterward that they were badly frozen before reaching a place of shelter.

The night wore away. There were but few eyes closed in sleep. The fires were carefully fed and watched. The winds subsided toward morning, and the full moon peered in upon us to say: "The storm is spent, and how have you borne its wrath?"

There was joy among us, when, about eight o'clock, an engine was seen approaching from the east with a snow-plough. Before ten o'clock it had reached us and drawn us back to the junction, where two or three other trains were in waiting. It was somewhat after noon when sleighs arrived,

chartered by the railroad company, to convey such passengers as did not choose to wait for the road to be broken to Ulrich's Hotel. It was a tedious, cold ride, but we were safely set down there, and partook of an excellent meal, for which the warm-hearted proprietor refused to accept any recompense.

Dr. Gildersleeve was one of several who stayed by the train.

"My wife will suffer more by the exposure of a sleigh-ride than by remaining quietly where she is," he said, as he pinned a heavy blanket around me, which had been sent in one of the sleighs. And he was indefatigable in his efforts to make every one comfortable—running from sleigh to sleigh, warming boards for the feet, and bits of wood for the hands, tucking in robes, and pinning down veils—and then the bells jingled and we saw his pleasant face no more.

I tried to recall what I had heard him say about the number of his residence, but could not. It was not far, however, from my own home. I thought of it many times, while I lay sick and suffering from the effects of my terrible experiences, for I did not leave my bed again before the following March. I had taken a cold, which alarmed both friends and physicians. My voice was entirely gone for three weeks, and medical inhalations were the last resort. I saw no one but Mrs. Vance. She was my daily attendant, and to her judicious ministrations I owed my final restoration to health.

I never mentioned Dr. Gildersleeve's name to her. What right had I to know the secrets of their youth? And she had

never, by word or look, given me the fragment of a license to touch upon her past life. There was the one barrier between us that I dared not pass. He called twice to inquire after me during my illness. She was sitting by my bed one day when his card was brought in, and his courteous message delivered. But her features did not change, and she dropped me some medicine the next moment without a perceptible quiver of a muscle.

Spicy's letters were read to me each week, and it was interesting to note her transformation into the character of counsellor and comforter, as soon as she heard of my illness. I should have been blind indeed not to have seen her steady, constant growth. She was beyond me already in many things. With all her childish ways and native simplicity, the angles of her character were getting pretty well rounded. Miss Gilbert wrote me one or two very encouraging letters in regard to her progress, but my love was far-seeing and could detect unnumbered evidences which the skill of experts might fail to discover.

Wherefore all this outcry about the inferiority of the provisions for female education, in comparison with those for men? The public-school systems of every State in the Union unquestionably advance both sexes alike. And where are any better institutions for young women than Miss Lyon's, Miss Gilbert's, and a score of other schools which I might name, where our daughters and sisters are instructed in every branch of knowledge, and every fine art for which they have any aptitude, besides partaking of the benefits which are to be derived

from the society of the best teachers money can procure? They live among tasteful appointments, they feast upon wholesome food, as well as concerts, lectures, and social reunions, and every refining influence which Christian love and thoughtful care can suggest is brought to bear upon them. There are thousands of women who have never improved under their advantages, as there always have been and will be thousands of men who believe in cheap, rough schools for their boys, forgetting how much culture can serve them hereafter.

As soon as I was able to ride, Mrs. Vance was untiring in her endeavors to give me all the fresh air I could breathe. Sometimes she accompanied me, but oftener her carriage came entirely at my disposal. Her venerable aunt Mary was quite ill, and she was divided in her cares. But I was gaining strength every day, and needed her less. Leonardus was looking forward to the termination of the war in a few months, and was giving me a new lease of life in each letter, in the shape of his probable and permanent return. He never knew all I had suffered.

June came, with its roses and sunshine, and I was once more on my way to New York. It was one of Dr. Wilder's prescriptions, and then I could not well forego the pleasure of attending Miss Gilbert's commencement.

I stayed at the hotel in company with my friends from Philadelphia, who met me there, for a few days previous to the examinations, knowing how much better off Spicy would be without my sisterly interruption at such a time. My health

was improving rapidly. New-York air was just the thing for me. Spicy declared it as her belief that "New-York stores, and plenty of money, was a much more effectual remedy for diseases in general."

How splendidly she acquitted herself when the great day at last arrived! She took a prize in scholarship. I knew she would; and I was elated, or inflated, until I feared my new patent button-holes on my dress might give way. They were made by machine, and I never had any faith in the invention.

The "essays" were to be read in the evening at the grand reception, and the diplomas awarded afterward. The young ladies of the graduating class were seated in a circle in the centre of the parlors, and looked like so many rare and beautiful flowers.

Just as I entered, a tall, high-foreheaded, black-bearded young professor—not of elocution—commenced reading the sprightly, analytical, satirical articles which the young ladies had been studying upon half the year, in a most intolerably humdrum and prosy manner. I was in an agony, and begged of one of the teachers near me to tell me why each young lady did not read her own.

"Miss Gilbert thinks it would not be proper. It would give the young ladies too much publicity."

"Publicity, indeed! How much more publicity, I pray, than to produce the happy effusions which are being so ruthlessly murdered!"

"Young ladies never read their own compositions in fashionable schools, Mrs. Belmore!"

"Fools, then, are in fashion!"

She stared at me, and I apologized immediately.

"Of course you are not responsible for the regulation, but it is one of the most painful entertainments it was ever my lot to witness. Here we are, not five feet from the assassin, and cannot fasten the sense of any two passages together! He rattles it off as one would shell corn! If a man must be selected to torture every guest assembled, why not have found one with soul enough to appreciate the misery he was giving! My poor, dear Spicy! Her valedictory address, so full of good points, and which would be so touching and effective in her own hands, must it meet the same fate? Yes, there it comes!—how aggravating, how absurd! The dolt! He does not know an interrogation-point from a pair of bars!—nor a dash from a high board-fence! Hear him bidding his classmates farewell! They raise curious mustaches in this young ladies' school if his is a sample! Now he has raised the mill-gate, and is inundating the teachers! Ah, the model school has not yet been achieved!"

I came to silence through my desire to listen to the few remarks which accompanied the presentation of the diplomas. The young ladies all stood. I wondered why they did not have veils thrown over them to prevent their being seen! Too much publicity, indeed! Why this crowd? If it is to become a source of harm instead of good, dispense with guests! But they are the friends of the young ladies, and are interested in their successes, you say? Precisely so. That was my first supposition. Hence my dismay when I found they were only to

be heard through a male translator, and one who did not know the elements of his own language!

I had hardly been so out of humor since my own school-days. My brow was clouded, and when Spicy came to greet me I forgot to commend. She was happy and unconscious, however, for did she not hold in her hand the scroll tied with blue ribbon?

"Now, Meddie, I must introduce you to all my friends," she said, with great animation.

The nearest one was Miss Hale. Miss Hale was bright and sparkling, wore a garnet-dress and diamonds, and talked bad English. I discussed the weather and the numbers present with her, and was relieved by an introduction to Miss Twissapple. Miss Twissapple was a Bostonian, had been at Miss Gilbert's one year, and was homesick; indeed, she said she did not think it right for any one to come from Boston to New York without being homesick! And then her lovely home was such a contrast to a boarding-school! Suddenly I was carried away to Miss Proudhead. Miss Proudhead was gotten up in tarlatan, with a great quantity of sash-ribbon and extra flutings. She was in love with New York—that old miracle, love at first sight. She wanted to stay here always. She introduced me to Mr. Simpson. Mr. Simpson was a theological student, very fresh, from some Western college, and very much distressed with the vanities of this world. He wanted to know if I had seen his friend, Dr. Steelpen. I had not. He was surprised, said he was the editor of the *Roaring Lion*, one of the leading evening papers, thought every-

body knew him, and went at once and found him, and brought him to me with a great profusion of bows. Dr. Steelpen looked like the other young men present, whom I supposed were only private citizens, wore cuir-colored gloves and a green necktie; asked me if I was any connection of General Belmore of the army; was very deferential the moment he learned that I was that gentleman's wife. Had a daughter in the school? No, that could not be possible! Some relative? A sister!—how very pleasant! Her name? Oh, yes; he had seen Miss Merriman. A few more questions were very adroitly put, and then Spicy broke up the little *tête-à-tête* by presenting Miss Rubicond, her pretty class-mate. Miss Rubicond took my heart at once. Her face was beaming with life and intelligence, and I forgot to notice what she wore. There is such a difference in faces

My eyes followed Spicy, as she moved airily and gracefully about among the guests, with fond admiration. She had grown very beautiful within the last year, and she was transcendently charming on this occasion. I did not so much blame Dr. Steelpen for causing an elaborately-written article to appear in the next issue of the *Roaring Lion*, calling her the belle of the evening; but I was indignant with Miss Gilbert for allowing a newspaper editor at her receptions, and tolerating the senseless gossip in the public prints as to how each young lady was dressed! Too much publicity for one of them to read her own essay, but quite the fashion to read the next day, as I did:

"Miss Spicy Merriman, of Chicago,

a sister-in-law of General Belmore, was the most bewildering beauty present, and the most elegantly dressed in point-lace over white satin," etc.

The dear child never thought of wearing any thing more expensive than tarlatan, and she never had a scrap of point-lace in her life! Dr. Steelpen said nothing, either, of its having been a school-reception! I cried with vexation, when I saw the ill-bred paragraph.

But I anticipate. Miss Rubicond was giving me a lively description of how she had had her pocket picked the day before, when I saw Spicy's face blanch, then light up with a thousand pretty scintillations, as she advanced to greet a gentleman who was pushing toward her through the crowd. I could not see his face distinctly without being rude to Miss Rubicond; but, after a while, I wondered who had secured my sister's attention for so long, when it was a rule of the establishment that no young lady should talk more than ten successive minutes with one guest! I turned, finally, to look, and at the same instant Spicy moved toward me, and introduced her companion:

"I beg pardon," she said, addressing him as the ceremony was about half completed; "but I never could pronounce your name!"

"Gildersleeve," he replied, bowing.

"Mrs. Belmore, Mr. Gildersleeve," Spicy went on with the utmost gravity; but, dropping her hand on my arm in a perfectly natural manner, she pinched me until I started with pain.

I found him handsome and agreeable. He may have been a trifle eccentric, for he coined new and odd words regardless

of the rules of etymology; but he was the more interesting for being original, and "was a gentleman of infinite jest and most excellent fancy." He had been abroad, had spanned the Mediterranean, had visited the land of the Pharaohs, and the temples of the East; had seen much, and forgotten nothing.

"Have you a brother in Chicago?" I asked, after a little.

"Yes, the Rev. Dr. Gildersleeve. I am going to see him in a few days. He thinks to persuade me to cast my burden in the West."

"He has not always resided there?"

"Oh, no. He worked at the trade of saving souls in the little town of Peculiarville, on the Hudson, for a few years. He first went to Chicago in 1860. He is one of your muscular Christians, broad-shouldered and strong-armed, and wages remorseless war upon the inactivity of the multitude. He is striving now for a revolution in journalism, and performs so much labor daily, with constantly-increasing physical and intellectual vigor, that he is supposed to have been the original promulgator of the doctrine that deterioration of bodily or mental powers under sixty is an unnatural decline."

Before I could reply, Miss Gilbert had ushered into my presence a stiff-necked gentlemen with a bald head, and some one had spirited away Mr. Gildersleeve.

Shortly after, a few sets had been formed for dancing in the crowded parlors, and I saw him taking his place with Spicy. I could observe him better at a distance, and admitted to myself that I had never seen a more elegant figure or a finer bearing. Spicy's face was like a

mine of brilliants, and when he paused every now and then to drink in the incense of her first girlish beauty, a pang of jealousy seized me and my spirit was all in arms against him. If I had known, what I afterward knew, how skilfully his well-timed arrival had been planned, and with what persistence he had secured his introduction to Miss Gilbert in order to be invited to her reception, I should hardly have shaken hands with him as courteously as I did when he made his adieux, or have extended the invitation, which fell naturally from my lips, for him to call upon us in Chicago.

"Would you ever have believed that old picture which I have housed so long was taken for him?" said Spicy, as she stood with her arms round me in the dressing-room. "I shall hide it now, for I feel as if I had been guilty of profanity."

What could I say to her? Had her heart read its destiny? I don't know why I should have arrived at any such foregone conclusion. But I had been driven there by inexorable intuitions. I asked myself many questions; and principally, were Spicy's eyes becoming open to that highest, holiest attribute of our nature, love? Had she tasted the first sweet consciousness of its existence, felt the first flutterings of its silken wings, and heard the first rising sound of that wind which sweeps over us all to purify or to destroy?

My thoughts were like a cloud-landscape, which may be comprehended but not explained. And why need we always explain? Some feelings are so untranslatable that no language has yet been found for them. They gleam upon

us through the twilight of fancy, and yet when we bring them close, and hold them up to the light of reason, they lose their importance all at once—like glow-worms which gleam with such a spiritual light in the evening, but, when subjected to the inevitable gas, prove to be only worms like so many others.

During our short visit to the seashore, and a few days in Boston and Albany, and a rather eventful and long-drawn-out journey homeward, neither Spicy nor myself once mentioned Mr. Gildersleeve's name.

Spicy grew more lovely each day. Happiness shone from every lineament of her face, and admiring eyes followed her every movement. Her exhaustless fund of gayety and vivacity won all hearts, and rendered her a most agreeable companion. I shall always want to remember her as she was then; the most gentle and true, the most gifted and modest, the most piquant and pleasing of only sisters. Fatherless and motherless and brotherless, we clung to each other, the two representatives of a large family who had long since gone to that home from which there is no return. Clung to each other did I say? That is, I clung to Spicy, as a mother clings to her child, and had been fondly looking forward to this era in her history, when we two could sit down and enjoy. And Spicy had always regarded me as her dearest and best friend. What did I fear? Why guard her with such green-eyed tenacity?

I had refitted and refurnished a room for her, which she declared was a perfect gem. Her own things were soon arranged in it, and a few brackets and ornaments and pictures added afterward,



gave life and effect to what I had previously placed at her disposal. But the old daguerreotype was seen no more, nor did I ever again hear any humorous allusions to it.

About three weeks after we returned, a neatly-executed card was sent up one evening "to the ladies." Spicy handed it to me, and I read "F. R. Gildersleeve." The exquisite blush which mantled Spicy's cheeks confirmed all my former theories. Oh! how should I snatch my jewel from its setting?

Bright was fretful that evening. He had cut his finger with a string and would insist upon my nursing and caressing it. I tried my best to quiet and leave him, but he was obstinate and detained me a prisoner in my room.

Spicy came in radiant about ten o'clock. She said Mr. Gildersleeve regretted very much not having seen me, but would call the next day at three in the afternoon to pay his respects to me, if I would be so kind as to admit him.

"Serene, full-orbed, divinely-impertinent chief of scoundrels!" I exclaimed, with fire flashing from every pore. "Indeed, I will not have any such kindness! It would be superhuman power of acting, and I am no hypocrite, whatever my faults!"

"What do you mean?" asked Spicy, with a look of unspeakable sadness, a sadness which was a sadness dear to the soul, and a great deal of down there in her voice.

"That I decline any further conversation on the subject."

## CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. BELMORE AND FRED GILDERSLEEVE.

MY resolution was taken. I had changed my mind since I dealt the cruel blow which had sent Spicy to her room like a wounded bird. Yes, I would see Mr. Gildersleeve when he should call, but I would not let this thing go on. No possible pain to Spicy weighed for a moment in the balance against my impulse to part them. It was sheer selfishness, but it was human. I might have remembered the lines which I once heard Nursy Brown singing to Bright:

"Nature's laws must be obeyed;  
And this is one most strictly laid  
On every soul which she has made,  
Down from our earliest mother:

"Be *self* your first and greatest care,  
From all reproach the darling spare,  
And every blame which she should bear  
Put off upon another.

"Had Nature taken a second thought  
A better precept she had taught,  
And good instead of evil wrought  
By those the power possessing—

"For *self* had been put out of sight,  
The love of others brought to light—  
In short, the wrong had all been right  
And man to man a blessing."

I heard the bell echo through the house, and in a few minutes my expected visitor was announced. I descended to the parlor armed to the teeth with the weapons of my disordered inclinations. I had not mistaken his errand. He was there to ask permission to pay his addresses to my sister. It was very gentlemanly done. But cost what it might I was bound to refuse his request. And I did. He did not ask me to give any reasons. He did not seem to presume that I had any worth giving. He evidently regarded me as capricious and unstable.

I was nettled by his aggravating coolness. At last he said, and I had that same painful consciousness of being talked down to, that had first come over me in connection with Spicy's aggrieved face the night before:

"I have not spoken to Miss Merriman on this subject, preferring most decidedly your approval before doing so, but in my opinion we are both too deeply in love for any particular good to come from interposition. It has been brought about by one of those inexplicable agencies for which we do not pretend to hold ourselves responsible. In my case, for instance, I have wandered through a pretty fair number of years, have paid my dividend of homage to the goddesses of beauty in one place and another, without ever having had my heart seriously touched until chance threw me in the way of your irresistible sister. Since then, I have very naturally decided that the heart cannot remain empty healthfully, neither must it feed upon itself. I esteemed it less than manly to reveal my love and try to win that of an unfledged birdling, so I tore myself away and went to Europe. The merest accident on the day before my departure threw us together for a brief moment, and without the knowledge of it on her part, or any intention of drawing it from her on mine, the certainty that she loved me became my secret, and has since given me the most ecstatic delight."

He took out his watch mechanically and glanced at the time, then rose, like one perfectly conscious of his advantages, personal and intellectual, and filled with a noble charity for what in his lordly way he no doubt esteemed my unavoid-

able acquiescence at some future period, and bade me good-afternoon.

I remained sitting like one in a dream. Spicy came in and sat down at the piano, but she only tumbled over her music, she did not strike a chord. I could not speak. I could not even look at her. Two scalding tears were forcing their way down my cheeks, and I covered my face.

It was with an effort that I could discharge my home and social duties respectably for the next two weeks. Spicy drifted about as blithe as ever, except that her sallies of humor were less frequent, and her cheeks were a trifle blanched. She had asked no question relative to my interview with her lover, a circumstance in itself perplexing, but in keeping with her singularly unreadable character. She had always been the surprise as well as the life of my life. If I had seen the pencilling on a card which was attached to an exquisite little locket containing a miniature, and worn next her heart, the veil which so obscured my vision would have been rent indeed. I was so unhappy that I applied to Mrs. Vance for counsel. I did not, however, reveal to her the gentleman's name, although she must have learned it shortly afterward.

"And you think they thoroughly suit each other?" she asked, after listening to my self-reproaches.

"It so appears from my point of observation."

"And you have no objection to the lover himself, his family, or his fortunes?"

"None whatever, as far as I am aware."



"I was nettled by his aggravating coolness."



"Then you ought to remember that right is right, just as wrong is wrong, and that true love is too rare a plant to be lightly crushed. Where would you have been but for its haven?"

I trembled, and the vague apprehension, bitterer by far than the torments of jealousy or the humiliation of wounded self-love, stood out in my mind like a veritable accuser, of my having sat in judgment and failed in justice.

"Why does not Spicy complain, or plead with me, and give me a chance to retract my folly?" I asked.

"Simply because it is unlike her to do any such thing," replied Mrs. Vance.

"But why does not the devoted lover appear once more and sue on bended knee for her hand? That is the way these difficulties are overleaped in books."

"I dare say he is not that type of a man."

"What shall I do?"

Mrs. Vance smiled at the despairing tone of my question. "If you have made up your mind that you cannot, will not, stand in the way of your sister's happiness, you have only to communicate that same fact to the gentleman in question, as I understand the case."

Thus I reasoned, myself, after her words reached my ears, and I welcomed the relief which my decision brought to both mind and body. But I did not know where to find Mr. Gildersleeve. I made sundry and divers private investigations all in vain. As the last resort I resolved to call on the Rev. Dr. Gildersleeve and his wife. The matter of calling on them had been on my mind ever since my recovery in the spring. It had

seemed rather an obligation than otherwise, after all that had occurred on that frozen railroad-train, and his courtesy afterward. I knew where they lived. It was in a pretentious-looking house, not five blocks away, and in a fashionable quarter of the city. I had noted it when I passed that way. A visit now would probably lead me into the knowledge of the whereabouts of the brother, and without any direct questionings either.

I dressed with more than my usual care one afternoon. Spicy commented upon the fact, and asked me if I was going to make calls. I replied in the negative, pinning my veracity to the singular number, and felt very much chagrined that I should be obliged to steal away like one setting out on a questionable expedition. Then she proposed taking a walk with me, and I declined her company, quite an unusual circumstance for one who was in the habit of publishing every why and wherefore of her movements to all concerned. I asked Spicy to remain at home and receive Mrs. Vance, who was coming to drive us out to Lake View. She looked surprised, but I hurried away before some new embarrassment should intervene. I rang the bell at Dr. Gildersleeve's door, and the servant appeared. It was a colored girl.

"Massa not in and Missus no see company."

I had nothing to do but leave my card and return home. We had not had rain for some time, and the streets on the north side, where there were no pavements, were filled with deep sand. In crossing one I sprang to get out of the way of a carriage, stepped on my dress,

and was pitched into the dust. I was not hurt, but inclined to glance my eye up and down the side-walk to see if I had been seen, and behold! a gentleman was running toward me. I turned my face the other way, and commenced shaking the dirt from my bottle-green silk, but in an instant he had stooped gracefully by my side, restored my card-case, and begged to hope that I had not injured myself. It was Fred Gildersleeve.

The next moment Mrs. Vance's carriage had halted, and, with a musical laugh, she asked me to ride, since I could not be trusted to walk. Mr. Gildersleeve handed me in, and I had the remarkable presence of mind to thank him, although I was too much disturbed and shaken up to be able to add what else was on my lips, and the opportunity was lost.

Spicy declined driving with us that afternoon. The horses were in fine condition, and we were back in time to drive to Lake Street to do some shopping. Mrs. Vance tried to persuade me to dine with her, and, not succeeding, bade me adieu at her own door, and sent the carriage home with me.

The new Rush-Street bridge had swung just before we arrived, and we were consequently foremost in the long line of vehicles which were waiting to cross. A tug tugging at two large vessels came screeching and yelling along toward the lake, and the horses stood on their hind-feet in an attitude of mortal terror. One leap forward and we should be plunged into the dark, dirty pool known as Chicago River. One leap to the right, and we should be entangled in a butcher's cart. One leap to the left, and a heterogeneous mass of human be-

ings huddled together, ready to spring upon the bridge, would be crushed. Every looker-on saw our imminent peril, and the imperative need of some strong hand to seize the heads of the frightened animals if a catastrophe would be prevented. Only one, however, in all that crowd, had the quickness and the courage to dart to the rescue. It was Fred Gildersleeve. He held them firmly, and infused so much power and protection into his voice, that the excited creatures were subdued, and, quivering and snorting and pawing the earth, made no attempt to break away from him. As the bridge closed he stepped one side to relieve their curbed impatience, and I, beckoning him to me, invited him to step into the carriage, and drive home and dine with us.

"It would give me great pleasure, Mrs. Belmore, but I am afraid of your horses," he replied, with a smile that had just enough of sarcasm in it to sting.

I felt that I was having as hard a time to undo what I had done, as Spicy did in trying to pay her two-dollar debt.

The next evening, however, the bell rang, and Mr. Gildersleeve's card was brought to me. I went to the parlor directly and met him with undisguised cordiality.

"And so I take it that you regard me no longer as a monster or a robber. But I do not accept this token of your favor as a reward for my services," he said, with that same high-up bearing which had so nearly annihilated me on a former occasion. "I love your sister, and, since your manner has indicated the kind permission, I have called to see her."

I entered into a somewhat ambiguous explanation, and concluded by sending Spicy to the parlor, and then, under the dim gas-light in my own room, rocked Bright in my arms, and cried until my eyes were inflamed for a week.

"My pet will owe her happiness to me," was my only solace, and I repeated the paragraph over and over again, in the same way as when a child I once declared, "I'm not afraid of the dark! I am not afraid of the dark! I'm not afraid of the dark!" running meanwhile as fast as my feet could carry me toward a lighted room.

When I next saw Spicy, her face wore that radiance which told me that her heart was at peace. Their engagement was speedily announced, and her wedding-day fixed for the first of February. Mr. Gildersleeve had greatly desired to be married during the holidays, but I would not consent. Spicy should be mine until the return of Leonardus.

Miss Terrapin was in her element. It was vastly more interesting to make wedding-garments than any other. It was Miss Terrapin's special forte. She thought Spicy might as well give up the whole care of it to her. But Spicy had ideas of her own about how she should dress as a bride. I was diverted by their frequent collisions, and not unfrequently called in as an umpire.

Miss Terrapin said, it had become a chronic necessity in these days for women to dress elegantly, yea, even extravagantly, in order to command their husband's little attentions, which were so apt to be bestowed elsewhere than at home. Marriage was in her opinion the grave of love. At all events it was a so-

vere test, for it brought intimate associations to bear upon unequal and ill-assorted dispositions, habits, tastes, temperaments, and capacities. And when, by reason of tender age (Spicy ought to have waited until she was twenty-five), inexperience, or the force of circumstances, such grave considerations were overlooked, then, of course, unhappiness and every other conceivable misfortune would surely rush in. She told my dainty little morsel that her own character was continually developing, while that of her husband might be said to have attained its growth.

"Then you would recommend that the deficiency be filled with dry-goods, if I understand you rightly?" modestly inquired Spicy.

"No, no; yes—well, that is, if young people have indulged fancies when their affections were immature and their tastes undeveloped, and they have become entangled for life with wants unsatisfied and feelings unsympathized with, they should make it a matter of principle to increase their personal charms in every possible manner. The country is full of rich people, the stores are laden with beautiful and expensive goods, there is a great deal of competition among ladies in regard to the quality and style of their apparel, and a young wife with the means at her command should unquestionably take the front rank if she wishes to retain the love which she fondly supposes her own."

"On the contrary, Miss Terrapin, I am full in the faith that there is no virtue, nor one amiable characteristic of our sex, that would not be relieved of a bane and nursed into healthier life, if this non-

sense about imperative fashion and costly dress were abandoned. Too much thought altogether is given to the subject. I believe in suitable attire. I like an exhibition of good taste at all times and places. If one hasn't any taste of her own, I say, employ Miss Terrapin. But I sha'n't buy as many silk dresses as there are colors in the rainbow for the sake of having a variety, nor have what I do see fit to buy furbelowed to my eyes. Neither shall I spend a whole year's income on the trimmings to my underwear. I had rather do as Mrs. Vance does, give my money to the poor, and I believe Fred would agree with me, if he was to be consulted."

"Ah, Miss Spicy, that is how women deceive themselves. Men never show what they really are until they have secured the prize. To-morrow there is a wedding, and then comes another to-morrow when there is despair and humiliation of spirit."

"Pleasant prospect! Miss Terrapin, you are an inveterate croaker. There, that shall be your name hereafter. Croaker! how do you like it? Now, Croaker, let me tell you a short story. It is as true as the book of Acts. Fred never fell in love with my rig. He first met me in a ball-room where I was dressed the plainest of any one present, and, he says, he asked to be introduced to me because he couldn't help it. Every time he saw me afterward was when I was in my very worst look, and yet he went on loving me like the apple of his eye. There is no mistake about it. He has proved it, hasn't he, Meddie? And he is going to live on proving it. You cannot stir in me the ghost of a doubt."

"Oh, yes. Admitted that he adores you—at present" (Spicy laughed with the old, silvery cadence), "but I have never heard any account of your intense reciprocation."

"Really, Croaker, that is too bad! I ought to have worn my heart on the outside as one wears a neck-ribbon, so that every one I met could have told the color!" And Spicy's little ireful retort took effect. "Meddie, what did you think when you found me sick in New York and nothing ailing me? Love! what is it? If to go through every phase of heart-anguish until it becomes a positive luxury is love, then I was in it for certain, although I did not know, myself, what was the matter at the time. I thought my life had all gone abroad never to return. When time tried the keenness of my despair I took alarm, refused to be so comforted, and marshalled all the sources of my distress anew. I should have defied the old tyrant with silent lamentations too grievous to be borne until the present day, if Fred had not returned. Come, Croaker, you understand all about it, wasn't that genuine love?"

"I dare say. But I never saw the man who had the power to affect me thus, and I have seen a good many in my day. You are foolish not to have bead trimming on this velvet. It is very much worn this year. But you must let me finish your black silk with it. It will be elegant round the postillion."

Mrs. Vance sometimes sat a whole morning with us in the sewing-room, and her lively off-hand descriptions of things and events, and her brilliant characterization of people, and ready repar-



tee, when Miss Terrapin advanced her odd and threadbare theories, the pet prejudices, cobwebs rather, of a spinster over sixty, and liable every day to get older, gave agreeable variety to the dull round of needle-work, and kept our senses whetted.

There had been no disenchantment in regard to my favorite, none whatever, since that first morning when, in my heart of hearts, I swore allegiance to her. She was the sort of woman who could love another woman with a whole-souled, earnest, heart-deep love. There was no assumption of superiority over others of her own sex. Her friendship deserved a better name than friendship. Hers was an elevated standard of merit, and I appreciated her rich gifts both of mind and of character. She was altogether devoid of flippancies, and yet gracefully, tenderly feminine. Sometimes, I found myself picturing her as the wife of some Leonardus whose tastes and aspirations harmonized with her own, and who recognized and valued her with a just estimate. She was clever as men are clever. She understood affairs, and had the power to centralize thought, and crystallize around her the highest forms of intellectual activity. She charmed men of mind by her clear, logical, and yet sprightly and piquant way of talking. She was a great reader, and never failed each day to devote some hours to study. If she only would go into society a little more! It is true she occasionally attended a dinner, or a private evening-entertainment, where I had urged her presence as a personal favor to myself, but ordinarily all her responses to invitations were the same sweet negative. I

wondered if her equipoise would bear the test when she came to meet Dr. Gildersleeve, as she certainly must at Spicy's wedding. He had gone to Europe with his invalid wife, and was travelling on the Continent now, but had promised his brother to be back in time, even if it involved another trip across the high seas.

My intimacy with Mrs. Vance was such that I visited her as she did me at any time of day or evening, as inclination or convenience dictated. Latterly, since Fred Gildersleeve was so much at our house, I often spent the evening with her, as I was more lonely in my lone room, with the happy pair in the parlor below me, than if no one had been under my roof but myself. On such occasions, she often read aloud, and we discussed the various points in magazine articles and new publications.

One evening I found her out. I went as usual to the library, which was her family sitting-room, where her venerable "Aunt Mary" was looking over a pile of letters. She was looking for her son's last. He was in Memphis, starting a business of his own, and when she found it begged me to excuse her while she wrote an answer. I took a book from one of the shelves to beguile the time. It was Sparks's "Life of Washington," an old edition with gaping wounds in the back. I turned to the fly-leaf in front and read the following in pencil: "Found on a railway-car, June, 1861.—I. E. V." At the same moment, a slip of paper fell into my lap from among the leaves, and I read what was written upon it before I took time to consider that it probably had been left in the book by accident,

and was not intended for other eyes than the writer's. It ran thus:

"I awake to a new existence. Poverty stares me in the face. I hear a whisper of labor and effort, which is in itself a whisper of peace. Henceforth, no more passive suffering, but a search for something to do. Oh! had my life but been blended with that one man's, whose heart my own comprehended! But hush! What is life, when we come to analyze it, but a mixture of three component parts, joy, sorrow, and work? Some get tolerably equal proportions of each; some unequal, or they fancy so. I believe the same things come alike to all. Years ago, when I was wading breast-high among summer-flowers, I heard a sainted lady say, 'If your trouble can be helped, help it; if not, bear it.' I did not comprehend the force of the passage then, but I do now.

"Yes, I have had days enough of bitter thinking. I suppose many a one before me has felt the sharp, slow, deadly pain, which gnaws at the root of things. But, was there ever a warm, loving heart so cold and comfortless? What is the matter with the sunsets and the dawns? Why is that great mid-day orb riding through the sky so royally but to mock me woe! I am a sad woman defrauded of rest. My heart is a storm-beaten ark. Who says that the hand that metes out the measure to us all never yet held false balance! Can I square myself to God's will, and bury my griefs so deep that no human eye can ever pierce the wound? Can I be whatever I will to be? Can I form and accomplish worthy purposes while my heart is withering and shriveling away? Can I walk alone and with

no faltering tread? Can I build on the heaped-up ruins of my cruel past a structure that will survive all future storms? Can I remember the simple fact that if life is a burden it has been imposed by God? The answer comes slowly and painfully, but comes; I can, I will."

I put the paper back into the book, and the book upon the shelf, and threw myself into an easy-chair to think. Shortly after, I heard the front door open and close, and Mrs. Vance's voice from the parlor. She had company. She had been to the weekly prayer-meeting, for she was a rigid church-member, and a gentleman had returned with her. It was a Dr. Greer, a dapper little man, with a head as round as a Spitzbergen apple, and covered with sandy locks, slightly flaked with white. He had a bright, agreeable countenance, upon which was stamped, however, the label, *Englishman*, and was one of the large real-estate owners of the city. He had had several business transactions with Mrs. Vance since she came in possession of her uncle's property, and then he was one of the elders in her church. I had always known him, always meaning the period of time that I had lived in Chicago. I could not see him from where I sat, but the parlor doors were open into the library, and I heard a part of the conversation. He had been saying something in an earnest but choked voice, to which I had paid but very little attention, when her reply, equally low, but more distinct, reached my ears, and the remembrance of it thrills me even now while I write:

"I shall never marry again, Dr. Greer. I have taught myself to look

forward to a blank existence. There is no staff, however dear to the womanly nature, upon which I may ever lean sheltered from the wind. I am outside of the pale within which married joys are found. There is a sorrow in my heart which the world knows not of, but one which I trust is healthfully borne. I lost the cordial drop with which Heaven graciously saw fit to sweeten my cup. I had my era of romance, a short-lived, delicious holiday, since when every fibre of my soul has been sharpened by the various ordeals which I have been compelled to pass through. My lines have not fallen in pleasant places. I should not be a fit companion for a man so pre-eminently worthy of a woman's best love."

There was a brief silence, and then I heard Dr. Greer's broken voice again, although I could not distinguish his words more than that they were indicative of a question. She replied:

"He was a gentleman in the highest and finest sense, always and everywhere a gentleman. I am ever ready to defend and justify my girlish affection. It has ennobled my whole life. By it, and through it, I have been so enabled to perform my duties and the work laid out for me, that there has been no time left for unavailing regrets. I believe I am a far better woman than I should otherwise have been."

Dr. Greer must have thought she was speaking of her husband, of whom he knew nothing, but that he had been killed in battle. But I, with my queerly-gotten knowledge, translated differently.

Mrs. Vance did not come directly to the library after showing Dr. Greer out.

Aunt Mary took off her spectacles and laid down her pen, and wondered where Ida had gone.

"She can't know that you are here?" she said to me.

"Oh, yes. My hat and shawl are on the piano. She could not have failed to see them."

My servant came for me a little later, and, thinking best not to prolong my stay, I ran up-stairs to bid Mrs. Vance good-night. I paused at the door of her room which was ajar, and on her knees before the flickering grate, with her head resting on an ottoman, was my dear friend, sobbing in the perfect *abandon* of grief. My first impulse was to fly to her and mingle my tears with hers, but the consciousness of what I knew, and how the knowledge had come to me, and of the barrier which she had interposed against all intermeddling with her private affairs, restrained me, and I went slowly back to the library.

"Good-night, Aunt Mary," I said; "don't mention that I have been here, unless Mrs. Vance makes special inquiries. I think that she does not know it, and, if not, it is just as well."

Too much wisdom is sometimes very embarrassing. It was decidedly so in my case, for I wished to have a little private reunion about a week before the wedding. Leonardus was home, Dr. Gildersleeve was expected, and Fred and Spicy were in that delightful mood to be pleased with any proposition, which would fall short of an excursion through the tunnel under the lake, the new and original inlet by which Chicago was arranging to borrow fresh water from an oceanic fountain. It was in process of

completion, and the chief wonder of the century. It was visited by thousands of people, but we had voted it too much of a bore for our personal investigation.

A dinner-party without Mrs. Vance! It could not be thought of. Would it be right for me to bring two persons together when I was the possessor of the secret of both their capacities for suffering? I put the question to Leonardus. He was unwilling to advise. Her carriage rolled up to the gate while we were discussing the question. Leonardus caught his hat, but I arrested him in his exit:

"Do stop and see her; why such haste?"

"I thought some other moment might be more favorable for my introduction."

"Nonsense!"

She was ushered in directly. She was dressed in heavy black silk and mantle of fur, her bonnet was of dark velvet the shade of the fur, and a handsome lace veil which was attached to it was thrown back, showing her lovely face just surrounded by a rim of white, with purple flowers over her forehead. It seems to go against all the ordinary canons of taste, but the white was becoming to her nevertheless. It was a sort of background for the dazzling whiteness of her complexion, from which no soft rose-flush ever went and came, but which was illumined by the rich blue of her beautiful eyes. It was so much her natural instinct to be courteous that she would have met my husband just as she did, under any circumstances, warmly through her love for me, with kindly remembrance from his having been a guest once in her own house

in Boston, as well as a friend of her deceased husband. The allusion to their former meeting was frank and outspoken, but quickly passed by for other themes, and it was impossible not to feel that the door was permanently closed upon any further mention of it.

A northeast snow-storm had just set in, a blustering reminder of my perils of the previous winter, and I rehearsed a few experiences, which were as yet new to Leonardus, and we all chatted gayly. Presently, there was a flutter and a welcome, and Spicy was creating a little ripple in the air by her presence in the room. She wore one of her pretty, fresh merinos, a garnet I think it was, and all the dainty, crisp bits of lace and bows of ribbon that are among the crowning triumphs of millinery seemed to have lighted upon her neck and wrists.

"I am expecting Fred every moment," she said, smiling. "He has gone to the cars to meet his brother, and if he finds him, and he can be persuaded, he is going to bring him directly here for me to inspect."

"And what if the brother does not suit the bride?" asked Leonardus.

"It will be a grave consideration," replied Spicy.

"And what of the brother's wife?" I asked.

"Oh! did I forget to tell you? She is not coming now. Fred has had a telegram. Dr. Gildersleeve has left her at a German cure where they hold out hopes of her ultimate recovery. He will return to her after he has seen us safely married, and attended to a few business-matters. He has struck oil. That is, the company that he has' stock in, have

struck, and he is likely to have his pockets well lined."

Then we all fell to discussing the oil question. I had always considered it a sort of lottery enterprise, and had been very much opposed to any investment of our funds in that direction. Cousin Phil had sunk all his own and his mother's property in the region of a Michigan well, and was there now waiting for something to turn up. Others had met with like misfortune. Oil had suddenly become the great topic of the day. Men of all classes and conditions were excited on the subject. A few shrewd minds and well-formed companies had won. Ministers and editors had, in many instances, invested, while careful businessmen superintended operations. That Dr. Gildersleeve should have bought shares did not surprise me, but I begged of Leonardus to run no risks.

Mrs. Vance took the earliest moment for leaving, and as Leonardus returned to the house, after having handed her to the carriage, I asked him what he thought of her.

"That the secret and charm of her singular sway over the intellect is not only her genius, but her genius all warm with the woman. She perplexes the fancy, and affects unconsciously those among whom she is thrown, as the magnet the metal. In my opinion she understands the world far better than the world understands, or ever will understand, her."

"And what about the dinner-party? I feel as if that little point must be settled."

"Give as many dinner-parties as you like. Invite Mrs. Vance by all

means. She will settle the question herself."

"Do you mean that you think she will decline my invitation?"

"I do."

Spicy was just leaving the room, seeing no doubt that our married eyes were quite content with one another. Leonardus stopped her.

"Spicy, have you ever spoken to Fred about those old letters and their contents?"

"No. Why?"

"Because I don't think it is right that you should. They concern two persons whom we have come to highly regard, and with whom we are very nearly connected. The Gildersleeve family, it seems, never knew of Grandison's early love-affair, and the facts which have become so painfully apparent to us ought not to be by any possibility betrayed. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes. But it is dreadful to think I must keep a secret from my husband! I wish we had never found the letters; I always said no good would come of it! I knew from the first that we should be sorry that we read them!—and I had the feeling that they were to be mixed up with my destiny, and they are. I commenced telling Fred about the ghost one evening, but he interrupted me to tell a ghost-story of his own, and I forgot to finish mine. As for the old picture, I was keeping that to surprise him with on our wedding-day. I suppose I ought to bury the whole subject, since one point cannot be touched without explaining the whole. But it will be the cloud of my life."

"You are a dear, good, reasonable

girl!" I exclaimed, throwing my arm around her. "The cost to you will be trifling, in comparison to the disagreeable embarrassment which may be warder from others by your darling caution."

"They've come!" she exclaimed, springing toward the window, as two gentlemen alighted from a hack in front of the house.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BRIDE AND THE BROTHER.

It was a pleasant meeting for us all. Fred Gildersleeve introduced his brother to his promised bride, with very much the air of a man who was reciting a poem of which he was exceedingly fond. It was interesting to watch his face, while he was watching them. Dr. Gildersleeve brought a full bouquet of roses to Spicy's cheeks by remarking:

"It is no longer a matter of surprise to me that the Benedict was ensnared."

I was glad to meet Dr. Gildersleeve for many reasons, and Leonardus shook his hand with the utmost cordiality. Outwardly there were few points of resemblance between the two brothers, except in height and *physique*. They towered above ordinary mortals, and were both men of remarkably fine presence. Fred was dark, and the wavy, brown hair, which we had read of in the love-correspondence, was getting more wavy and brown every day, and an elegant mustache set off his handsome face to great advantage. Spicy's young-lady friends pronounced him "splendidly fascinating," and represented themselves as

dying with envy, and, were there any more such in New York if they should go on there and attend a boarding-school?

Dr. Gildersleeve was lighter, fairer, older, but one whom it would be difficult to pass in the street without a second look. He had an attractive face; character, culture, and power, shone from it. I esteemed him much the handsomer man of the two, but there is no accounting for tastes. His active brain and cheerful mien kept reminding me of the little verse:

"God means every man to be happy, be sure;  
He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.  
Our duty down here is to do, not to know;  
Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so."

I noticed that he never spoke of his wife, except when questioned.

"I think she is afflicted with some terrible malady," said Spicy, when we were alone again, "because I notice that same peculiarity in Fred. He seems to avoid the subject, and once or twice has remarked upon the eminence his brother might have attained in scholarship but for domestic interventions and constant nursings. He says Grandison is a great thinker, a ready writer, just saturated through and through with genius; in fact, got all the brains in the family, and all the goodness, too. It makes me laugh to hear him go on. He says he would like to be as good as his brother, but he wasn't born to it; he only holds on to good principles by the edges, the greater part of the plank escapes him!"

"We must find out whether Dr. Gildersleeve was really the author of that new volume of 'Synonymes,' which Mrs. Vance was showing us last week. You know what we thought about it."

"Yes, it was he; I inquired of Fred. And he is just now upon the eve of publishing another large work. Fred has copies of all the books he has written, and after we get back from Washington I am going to make myself familiar with every page of them."

"Washington! My dear child, that word makes me think of twenty things which ought to be done this very day. I have put too much off until the last week, which is always my way, you know. I am glad you are more systematic and sensible. No thanks to me, you have been my example for many months, instead of I yours, which would have been more according to Hoyle."

"Don't disparage yourself, Meddie; you are the darlinest sister in the world—"

"As well as the most improvident. I am glad I have you to defend me."

"Mrs. Vance will step into every niche you leave unfilled, as usual—"

"There it is, again—'as usual.' It is true, and very humiliating to reflect how much I do lean upon Mrs. Vance. I wish I had ever been able to stand alone."

I did not give the dinner-party, but both Dr. Gildersleeve and Fred dined with us nearly every day until the great day of days. It was a beautiful week—a sort of enchanted episode—particularly to the lovers. But you know the story. When you lived it you did not find it tame, or old, or commonplace. It is sweet and sacred to all who have ever dwelt in the charmed atmosphere. Spicy was not once flurried in the matter of preparation, although she exercised a close supervision over every thing appertaining to her toilet. Miss

Terrapin had bent to work under orders, whether they suited her notions or otherwise, and her brideship was always ready to receive and entertain Fred without any apparent cares. Not so with your humble servant. I was like Martha of old, careful and troubled about much serving.

Mrs. Vance did not come to see me once. I was too busy to go to her, and, consequently, we did not meet. I missed her more than I could have made any one believe, and fully realized how much I had been in the habit of consulting her in matters of every-day life. Fred, who had been accustomed to see her at my house so much since he first became a visitor, noticed and commented upon her absence. I heard him describing her to his brother one evening, as among the few women who really knew how to handle a fortune consistently, and then he entered into an elaborate picture of her charities, her homes for the poor, and her hospitals and good works generally. Dr. Gildersleeve was interested, and remarked that he should like to know her. Ah, he little dreamed how well he already knew her!

I wondered if the meeting with Dr. Gildersleeve was going to prove to her a martyrdom as formidable as the fagots and the stake! For, of course, she would meet him at the wedding, even if she deserted me until then. Alas! I had counted without my host. I awoke one morning stranded on a barren shore. A note was brought me from my sweet friend, saying she had been summoned to Buffalo to look after some long-unsettled business-matters connected with the estate of her deceased brother, and

should probably not return for some weeks. She expressed regrets at being compelled to forego the pleasure of making one of our happy number on Tuesday, and enclosed a darling little note of congratulations and kind wishes to Spicy. A little package was also delivered by the same messenger, and tears were swimming in the eyes of the bride of to-morrow, as she held up for our inspection an exquisite and costly set of pearls.

Fred and Spicy were married in St. James's Church. There was an unusual display of elegant toilets on the occasion, a crush of silk, gossamer, and lace—it was said that the *crème de la crème* of both the north and south sides were present—the white-gloved, white-vested ushers ran to and fro, and were all affability and attention; friends saw friends and bowed from pew to pew, uninvited guests crowded round the doors and in the galleries, and the great organ pealed forth a joyous strain. Then came the hush!—and every eye was turned in eager expectation. Yes, they were coming!—and, as the imposing party passed up the aisle and divided to the right and left, and Leonardus gave away the bride, and the ceremony was duly solemnized, there was a stillness which might have revealed to quick ears the thuds of my heart, for I remembered there and then that I had forgotten to put on the broad belt and buckle, the crowning glory of my grand *moire antique*, and, what was all the more painful, I remembered just when I had forgotten it—when Leonardus called me, and told me that I was keeping the whole crowd in waiting. But, as the happy pair turned to leave

the church, there was a change in the programme, and the clearly-defined murmur of admiration which reached my ears all along the route—for I was not far in their wake—swelled my sisterly heart almost to bursting, and led me into the comforting assurance that my own attire had not been criticised. I had, or rather took, time to finish dressing before taking my two hours' stand in the parlors. The reception over, and then came the adieus, and the wedding-party were on their way to Washington.

I was anxious to finish the day better than I had commenced it, so I straightened all my parlor furniture before I retired. I rolled one sofa over my foot, and then cried. A little *arnica* relieved the pain, and a cup of coffee put me to sleep. It keeps most people awake, but I am sorry to say that I am not like most people. The next day Maggie found me crying again, and asked me what was the matter, and I told her that Bright had shut the door against my finger and pinched it. Later, the cook came to ask me some trivial question, and was greatly distressed to find me crying, and I appeased her anxiety by telling her that I had just discovered that the sewer was out of order, and was overwhelmed with dread at the prospect of having plumbers in the house. Last of all, Leonardus came late to dinner and found me crying! He learned, to his infinite amusement, that I had come to grief because the pea-soup was cold! He spent the evening with me, and tried to teach me the glorious principle of taking life as I found it. I had not lost a sister, I had only added to my possessions a brother, and still had a husband who would shield me from want



and provide for the morrow, and, as a living evidence of the assertion, he took me in his arms, and with a smile, which disclosed a depth in his nature I never had known, he pulled the scarlet bow from my throat and fastened my collar with a new diamond brooch. And then he talked to me as only a true lover can talk, and the more I looked and listened the more I discovered in him perfections unnoticed before. Ah! all that soul said to soul, or that heart gained from heart, in that blessed interview who shall enroll? What is it that so often chills two beings who are united for life? Not the absence of love so much as the ignorance of how love is nourished by love.

We expected that Fred and Spicy would spend their first wedded year with us; but, immediately after their return from the bridal journey, there was a change in their plans. Fred had been more successful in some of his speculations than he had even anticipated, and decided to purchase a handsome marble-front house on the avenue, which was in the market at a bargain, and go to house-keeping. They fitted it up prettily, but did not furnish it all at once, reserving their choicest selections until such time as convenient to jaunt East together and explore the world of art and beauty.

It was April before Mrs. Vance returned, to find Spicy for a neighbor on the next block below her. She called immediately, but she declined Spicy's first invitation to dinner, and did not visit me quite as freely as heretofore, although there was not the slightest change in her friendship or demeanor. Dr. Gilderleeve was not with us often. I hoped she was not staying away through fear

of meeting him, but I dared not speak to her on the subject.

And while I was revolving the question in my mind, the air was all at once solemn with the tolling of bells! Minute-guns reverberated from mountain to mountain across this great continent! The cities, the towns, the hamlets of our broad land were draped in mourning! The nation's heart had been touched by the finger of death! The President of the United States of America had been felled by an assassin!

Chicago was in tears. Men spoke to each other on the streets with quivering lips. Merchants closed their stores. Black and white goods seemed to fall as with one accord from every building. Five years before that very month, the same city blossomed with flags and echoed to the booming of cannon, and the jubilations of assembled thousands, as the news was announced that the convention in the Lake-Street Wigwam had nominated Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, as its standard-bearer. Chicago honored and loved him. It was in her courts that he first laid deep and broad the foundation of his legal attainments, and gained that distinction which placed him peerless among the ablest counsellors in the land. It was Chicago who first summoned him from comparative obscurity in a political sense, and watched with pride his wrestle with an able and cunning debater, until his sagacity and honesty and purity had been established beyond question. Chicago had sent him out a brave, earnest, hopeful, Christian man to save the country. And, just as his work was finished, the Republic vindicated, its enemies overthrown and suing for peace, he had

been slain—slain, while interposing the hand of his great charity and mercy between the wrath of the people and guilty traitors!

A few days later, and the people of Chicago tenderly received his sacred ashes, with bowed heads and streaming eyes. No other community did itself such peculiar honor by the vast magnitude, the perfect order, and the solemp beauty of the funeral obsequies. About thirty-six thousand persons participated as members of organized military, civic, municipal, educational, religious, and other associations, apart from at least one hundred thousand citizens who thronged the line of the procession from curb-stone to house-top. Leonardus was one of the grand marshals, and took me at evening to the broad hall in the court-house above where the remains were being viewed, and where over one hundred of Chicago's best singers were assembled, who, with soft, sweet, melancholy strains, added sublimity to the universal sorrow. A pitiless rain was pouring upon the long lines of people who surged through the rotunda during the sad hours of the night, but it occasioned no diminution in their numbers. At intervals dirges, both solos and concerted pieces, were sung, suitable to the time and place. At midnight a beautiful and impressive dirge was chanted by all present with thrilling effect. It was one of the most interesting incidents of this long-to-be-remembered occasion.

Charity! Scarcely were the remains of our loved chief magistrate laid in their native earth, when charity was again the theme in Chicago. Another Sanitary Fair, to raise funds to minister to the

wounded and dying men of our armies; a Fair prodigious in its proportions, gorgeous in its display, admirable in its arrangements. Chicago laid the cornerstone of the finest palace ever reared by civilized humanity, when she inaugurated the first Sanitary Fair. New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Boston, and other cities, reared thereon a glorious superstructure, and now Chicago was determined to crown the lofty dome amid the clouds—an everlasting monument of the gratitude and generosity of the American people.

The two great armies of the Union were on the homeward route. They had won magnificent victories, accomplished vast results, came off more than conquerors, done and dared and suffered all that men can do and dare and suffer in the cause of popular government and human freedom, and justice and right. They were returning to exchange the discomforts and privations of the camp for their own firesides. They had poured out their blood in rivers. They had left their dead in thousands; but they had crowned the nation with present blessings, and heaped up for it prospective honors. Chicago was not content with bestowing medals on the living, and rearing statues in memory of the fallen. Veterans, who had left positions of honor and profit, which were now filled by others, must be cared for. Those who had come back incapacitated for work by reason of wounds, must be cared for. Hence this gigantic Fair, which culminated in magnificent success.

I took an active part in the art and trophy department, and was doomed to four weeks of hard labor. Spigy was

there, Mrs. Vance was there, everybody was there who was not in some other department. No one thought of staying at home while the Fair lasted. It was a continuous holiday, a gay festival, which was fully appreciated and enjoyed by visitors, though a season of incessant toil to those who were employed therein. But all were inspired by love for the cause, and hardships were hailed as a positive pleasure. And still, with steady tramp, the heroic legions came—not as they went, with gay colors and full ranks, but worn, weary, bronzed, with tattered rags fluttering in the breeze, and vacant places in their ranks. They were all welcomed at the Fair by the truest hearts that ever beat responsive to the calls of gentle philanthropy.

Neither last nor least came our two great generals, and enthusiasm was at its height. I looked around me, wondering whether the building would stand the crush, or yield, like the Temple of Dagon of the Philistines, under the pressure of Sampson—for surely I knew they brought the gates of other cities with them. Half bewildered I saw Leonardus among the celebrities on the platform, and presently a rich, deep voice pronounced the words of welcome to our illustrious guests in behalf of the managers of the Fair. It was that of Dr. Gildersleeve.

General Grant called upon Governor Yates, of Illinois, to respond for him, which he did. The cry of the multitude was then for General Sherman, who arose and remarked pleasantly :

“I am not here for the purpose of making a speech; I am here, like yourselves, merely as a spectator. I have

always been ready to obey my loved commander-in-chief, but I am sure he will not order me to make a speech.”

General Grant, standing near, smiled, and, advancing, said :

“I never order a soldier to do any thing that I cannot do myself.”

How the hall rang with applause at the happy retort!

On some accounts distinction may be desirable, but it is certainly invested with many inconveniences and perplexities, which detract sadly from its pleasures. I was led to that sage remark by the remembrance of how General Grant made many and hopeless efforts to see some of the beauties of the Fair. The crowd followed his most trifling movements. We made one grand effort to inveigle him into the picture-gallery, which was one of the finest collections of paintings ever exhibited on this continent; but it was a hopeless failure, and his arms were nearly wrenched from his shoulders by the eagerness of the multitude to grasp his hand. Fred Gildersleeve said he would rather be happy than great; and I thought Spicy, who stood leaning on his arm, looked very much as if she coincided in the same opinion.

Dr. Gildersleeve sailed for Europe in July. A little later Leonardus took me to the White Mountains and to Newport, and during the autumn following we went to Havana, so that for nearly a year I spent but a few weeks at home. When I once more returned to our newer civilization and my corner house, I was introduced to a young lady who was the fac-simile of my sister Spicy, as seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass. She was the baby of babies. There had

never been another before her, in the estimation of her delighted parents. Fred stopped Leonardus on the street to tell him the color of her eyes. Spicy told me, to the hour and minute, how old she was when she first laughed.

But if Miss Lulu Gildersleeve was the most remarkable girl who ever crammed her fists into her mouth, and screamed when she was not rocked or jounced about, then I hardly know how to impress you with the importance of the characteristics of the young Chicagoan, Tobias, who appeared upon the stage of action about a year and a half later, and who could exact more attention, and drive more nurses frantic, than any other youth of his size in all the West.

The years were gliding noiselessly by. Stirring events were not the fashion any more, either in city or household. We had fallen naturally and easily into old relations and habits, and Miss Terrapin continued to quote me among her customers. Mrs. Vance was still my bosom friend, and we both entered as heartily and graciously as ever into any and every plan which brought us together. We fully reciprocated each other's entertainments and invitations; we had our readings and our literary circles, and, except that Mrs. Vance had gradually widened the sphere of her acquaintance, there was no perceptible change in the atmosphere of our intercourse. She was called the brilliant Mrs. Vance by those who were favored by an admittance to her select little gatherings, but the subtle undercurrent of her life was Christian charity. The good she did in her quiet, unpretending way could not be told in a thousand volumes, and all the graces

of benevolence seemed to pursue in her train. The poor followed her to praise and to bless. She wrote occasionally, sometimes a story so effective in narrative as to utterly astonish me; then, again, poetry would reel from her pen, revealing sympathies ready and keen, and a large, warm heart ineffably tender and loving. She never published any thing under her own name, but her impersonal articles frequently found their way into the leading periodicals. She was essentially healthy in mind and body, and I felt that no one sooner than she would have laughed to scorn sickly fancies and imaginary woes.

Dr. Gildersleeve was in Chicago a part of every year, and in Europe the remainder. But he was always very much engrossed while in the city, and the collision between himself and Mrs. Vance, which had seemed to me almost inevitable, had never occurred.

Spicy's home had grown to be one of the most charming in Chicago. They had furnished it by degrees, never buying any thing that was not the most choice, as well as the most costly, of its kind. Their parlors were gems of beauty, and every thing was in the most perfect taste; their paintings would have graced the mansion of any connoisseur in art. In the great whole they had studied effect with so much effect, that the most pleasing effect was produced.

Spicy named her second boy Grandison, and received from his uncle on the next Christmas an elegant little *coupé*, and a pair of beautiful horses—"nobby" Fred called them—as a token of his appreciation of the notice. Spicy was one who rarely ever showed exultation over

any thing of the kind; but, when she drove over in her new carriage to call upon and show it to me, her eyes were ablaze with delight. I wished the giver could have seen her with her whole soul speaking from her face as I did, and he would have realized the exquisite pleasure he had conferred.

"Dear Meddie," she said, "you know how I have always wanted a carriage. It has seemed of late as if my life, or some one else's life, or something of exceeding great magnitude, depended upon it; and yet, I would not for the world have been so foolish as to have asked Fred to buy one until we were older, and more dignified and sedate. Now it has come unexpectedly, just as every other good thing has come to me all my life! Isn't it nice? Don't you like the trimmings? Oh, I am so happy with it!"

Leonardus had business that promised to detain him in New York City through most of the summer of 1871, and he went out to a little village of villas on Long Island Sound, and rented a furnished cottage. It was a beautiful point, shaded and picturesque. I enjoyed the salt air and sea-bathing, and Bright was happy as a young king, with his twenty acres of private play-ground and his cliffs and grand old trees.

Fred and Spicy made us a flying visit in August, and it so happened that Mrs. Vance was able to time her summer's journey to meet them at our house. We exhausted our country resources for their amusement; fished and rowed and yachted, played croquet, took lessons in swimming, and drove over the fine roads in our little dog-cart. Last of all we

went on a shopping-expedition to the city, in view of a gay winter in Chicago.

We had done all the prominent stores pretty thoroughly, and were hurrying toward the New-Haven train with our hands full of packages, when Spicy remembered that she had promised to call upon a friend in Harlem, and this would be her only opportunity. Mrs. Vance proposed to go directly home, while I went with Spicy to the Third-Avenue cars. We had to stand at first, as people who ride there usually do, but at last obtained seats by squeezing in between two large women. When we went to get out at One Hundred and Twentieth Street I missed my pocket-book. I told Spicy on the platform of the car. She thought we had better look for it, and while we were talking the car started. I spoke to the conductor, and he looked on the floor to see if I had dropped it. I stepped in and assisted in the search.

"Wall, indade, an' I thought it was you yourself, Mrs. Belmore. Say, an' have ye got a good cook now? I'm jest lookin' for a place, an' I makes things illigant you know, an' I can come right away too."

It was the large woman, who had been sitting next me, who thus addressed me, and it took but a second look for me to recognize in her my Ann of Chicago memory.

"How do you do?" I said, pleasantly. "Did you see my pocket-book?"

"Bless your dare heart, an' was it yours sure? I picked one up on the floor—here it is!" and my property was again in my possession, to my great delight. "Where do ye live, ma'am? I

can go right away with ye—I'm all riddy."

"No, I don't want a cook; I'm obliged to you."

Spicy had stopped the car, and I stepped along to get out.

"You have taken us somewhat out of our way," she remarked to the conductor.

"Sit right down, ladies, and I will take you back again," he replied.

We both remonstrated, but the horses were taken off one end of the car and attached to the other end, and we were set down at the right corner. We both laughed; it was a courtesy never before shown us on a public conveyance. As the conductor assisted us off, he lifted his hat, and said:

"Tell General Belmore that Tom Harris remembers his kindness at Vicksburg," and as we had to hurry to the sidewalk, to get out of the way of a carriage, we had no chance to reply, for the horses speedily came round to the fore-end of the car, and it started off at a brisk rate to make up for lost time.

"Poor Ann; so she has not acquired honesty by length of years," I said.

"And yet she cooks jest as illigant as ever," remarked Spicy, with a laugh. "Who ever expected to meet her again? It has brought that old ghost-affair all fresh to my mind. It was very mysterious about that apparition in the blue-room, wasn't it?"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DR. GILDERSLEEVE'S SUNDAY-EVENING CALL.

It was one Sunday evening, shortly after our return from the sea-shore, that we were agreeably surprised by a call from Dr. Gildersleeve. He had arrived in the city on Saturday morning, and taken rooms at the Sherman House. He had brought his wife with him this time, although she was able to be moved only on a bed. Her mother, Mrs. Hortense, was in attendance, but herself suffering with a sprained ankle. He had been so fortunate as to secure in New York an old nurse who had lived with them while in Peculiarville, and congratulated himself that the ladies would both receive all necessary care.

I expressed great interest, and asked if a call from me would be agreeable to them.

"Certainly. But Mrs. Gildersleeve's mental condition is such that I am afraid it will afford you but poor satisfaction. During the past twelve years she has had but few lucid intervals, and I have but little hope left that her reason will ever be restored."

A gust of wind blew the front-door open, and Leonardus sprang to close it.

"Did you see the fire last night?" he asked, addressing Dr. Gildersleeve.

"Yes. I was in the editorial office, writing an article for the next issue of my paper, when I was informed of it, and went over to the west side. I saw Dr. Greer at work upon the roof of one of his large buildings, endeavoring to save it, and, knowing there was but one means of exit, I considered him in great

danger, and with much difficulty succeeded in gaining admission in order to warn him. The danger was averted, however, and we remained together all night on the roof, looking down upon the many burning blocks, the greatest conflagration it will probably ever be our lot to witness."

"Have you seen Spicy?" I asked.

"Yes, I ran in a few moments yesterday. What a charming mother she makes! I found her entertaining her three little ones with a miniature velocipede, which she had just bought. My precocious little namesake was intent upon experimenting personally, and toddled after the contrivance until it was overtaken, and he had crowned his ambition by a seat upon it. Poor fellow!—he took his first lesson in the perishability of earthly joys," and a rare smile played over the face of the speaker.

"Did you see Fred in New York?" asked Leonardus.

"Yes, I stopped at the St. Nicholas, where he stays. He will be home in about two weeks. He is making so much money that I am afraid he will not know what to do with it, and I have been advising him to take a rest. I know of no one more supremely blessed than he seems to be in his business, and in his family. He ought to be, and is, I believe, fully appreciative."

Was he drawing comparisons, this man of such singular balance of character, and the records of whose honorable and prosperous career were so devoid of blemish? My thoughts were turned into another channel, the next moment, by his remark:

"General Belmore, it strikes me that

in all modern history there is nothing quite so marvellous and captivating as the growth of Chicago. I am more and more impressed with it every time I return from abroad. The immense hotels and business-blocks which have shot into being within the last five or six years, stop me in wonder as I pass them. It appears almost incredible that the site of such a city as Chicago is to-day, should, forty years ago, have been only a great, reedy, miasmatic marsh on the shore of an inland sea!—and that an even dozen of log-cabins gave shelter to less than a hundred fur-dealers. See!—it is but a few years since, tired of the mud and marsh and miasma, she lifted herself to six or eight feet of higher level. I shall never forget my sensations when I first saw large hotels suspended in the air, while new foundations were being laid and new basements built. There seems never to have been any project too bold, or enterprise too great, for her to undertake. She has been sufficient for herself in all emergencies. She takes rank with great capitals. Hers, after New York, is the best-known name in Europe, and there is no story too wild in relation to her but will obtain credence there. Now, since the bridges have not been found adequate to the demand for travel across the river, highways have been constructed underneath, and to conquer that same river, which was obstinate about discharging its filth into the lake, the lake has not only been turned into the river, but the whole emptied into the Gulf of Mexico!"

Leonardus, half reclining on the lounge, with his cigar in the tips of his

fingers, laughed, without answering immediately.

"And yet the whole world, and Europe in particular, will persist in styling us 'brags,' if we by chance mention such facts. I think that if there is any class of men entitled to the privilege of bragging, it is those who have lent their aid toward making Chicago what she is," he said, at last.

"What a gale!" I exclaimed, starting up as one of the shutters came against the window with such force as to shiver a pane of glass.

"It is a terrible night! I believe I will hurry back to the hotel before the rain sets in. These southwest winds are portentous," and Dr. Gildersleeve rose and buttoned his coat.

Leonardus went to the door with him. He called me directly to see the new fire, which was lighting up the heavens with a strange, unnatural hue. Dr. Gildersleeve said it must be full five miles away. Leonardus remarked:

"You go to bed, Meddie, and I will walk over to the south side with Dr. Gildersleeve and see where it is."

"Oh, don't!" I exclaimed, with much anxiety in my look and tone.

"Never fear, wifey, I sha'n't go to the fire; I shall be back in an hour at farthest," and he kissed me and went on.

People were just hurrying home from church through streets brilliant with gas, some being drifted along without effort of their own in a northerly direction, while others were contending against the sharp storm of dust in order to reach localities nearer the river. One of my servants, who had had a "Sunday out,"

returned just then, and, seeing me in the door-way, turned to come up the steps, and was blown against the railing with such force that her hand was bleeding. I took hold of her and helped her in, and it required all of our united force to close the door. The gas-jets in the hall and parlor had all been extinguished by the fury of the blast, and we had to relight them.

I was not robust in health, and thought best to retire. My room was in the northeast corner of the house, the most remote from the street, and the least likely to be penetrated by noise or disturbance. I drew my shutters together close, and pulled down the shades. The bells rung near by for a few minutes, and then stopped. I wondered how the fire would be subdued in the face of such a wind, and wondered who would be able to alleviate the ocean of misery it must occasion.

I fell asleep, but only to dream of Leonardus and fire-bells. I waked several times, just enough to think, "Why, the whole world must be on fire!" but I slept again after each waking. A little past midnight I started up, whirled up the window-shade and looked out. The heavens were one broad, lurid glare, except when great black fiery columns of smoke rushed past. The sight appalled me. Where was Leonardus? Why had he not returned? What fearful disaster was impending over Chicago?

I shivered with cold or nervousness, it mattered not which, and I drew down the shade again and got into bed and covered my head with the bedclothes; but I slept no more. I was hearkening, constantly, for Leonardus's step in the hall.



He would certainly come soon to tell me the terrible news, whatever it was. I could hear men screaming and swearing in the distant street; I could hear a strange roar, which I supposed was the wind. Then came a jar, and a reverberation like distant thunder.

What was that? My door-bell!—ringing, ringing, ringing! Would it not stop long enough for me to get to it? Leonardus must have lost his key. Down the stairs I flew, not even taking the precaution to throw a shawl about me. No, it was not Leonardus; it was Mrs. Vance's coachman, and he wanted to bring Mrs. Chafferlee, Mrs. Vance's dear aunt Mary, in. Would I help him? Why, what is the matter—is the whole south side on fire? Yes, and Mrs. Vance had sent her to me for safety.

I caught a water-proof from the hat-rack—it was singularly fortunate that it should have happened to have been there, one good result of negligent house-keeping—and ran out to the carriage with bare feet. What help could I render, slight, frail, weak creature that I was, and Mrs. Chafferlee, though much emaciated by reason of old age and long illness, being of a large, bony frame, full twice my size?

"I can get hold of her, ma'am, only I am rough-like and hurt her," said the kind-hearted coachman.

"Never mind, never mind. Make haste; I want you should get back to Ida," came from the feeble voice inside.

The great, clumsy fellow grabbed her and ran up the steps, I holding upon the skirts of her dress just enough to retard his free progress. He laid her upon the sofa in the parlor, for he was afraid he

should drop her if he undertook to ascend a flight of stairs. Then he ran and brought in a basket, and a bundle of loose things tied up in a shawl.

When he was gone, I tried to light the gas, and it would not burn. I wondered if any thing had happened to the gas-works. The room was almost as light as day, however. I got a pillow for Mrs. Chafferlee, and fanned her, for she seemed faint. Some of Mrs. Vance's valuables, I supposed them to be, had scattered through the hall when the coachman threw them in, by the untying of the shawl which held them, and I went out and gathered them up. I did not stop to look at them, I only noticed a jewel-case, some packages of papers, marked important, a small lodger, and—could it be possible!—yes, the very identical little picture of Bright, upon ivory, which I had given to Nursy Brown eight years before!

The whole mystery of that "*person*" was thus suddenly revealed. I saw it all—her incomparable goodness, and the greatness of the woe which could have driven her to such a refuge. And the germ of all that love, with which she had since been bound to me—ah, the secret she had probably intended to keep until her death! What a strange, new light had burst upon me—what a horrid light was glaring in from without!

I must dress. I could not be running about the house in that condition, and people coming, too. Others might fly to us as well as Mrs. Vance. I called Bright, my little man of ten years, and told him to slip on his clothes and run down and stay with "Aunt Mary," while I made my toilet. Had I better call the

servants? Monday was a busy day for them, and it was hard that they should lose their sleep.

I had got my hair up respectably, topsies and all, when I concluded I had better call the servants, and ran through into the wing where they slept. It was their first waking, and they were stunned with the horrid spectacle from without.

"The fire is on this side of the river, I am sure," said Maggie, who was one of those rare appendages to the household who had proved faithful for many years.

"Oh, it can't be; there is no danger here," I replied.

"And the clothes-lines will all be getting full of soot and dust, and I shall have such a boggle about drying my clothes this week again," whined Esther, the cook.

I hurried to my room and took down a heavy alpaca dress to put on; then the heat was so great, or I was feverish, and I changed it for a lighter material. I could not find my collar with the double points, and then I took a distaste to the Roman scarf I had worn that Sunday, and actually spent several minutes hunting for a "made bow" of scarlet, with which to adorn my throat. My over-shoes were lying upon the floor in one corner of my room, and, without knowing why, I put them on; then I spread up my bed, put away my brush and comb, picked up loose pins, and stuck them in the cushion, and, last of all, took down a little feather-duster, which always hung by the window, and dusted the bureau and table. I was literally setting my house in order.

Bright called me. "Aunt Mary"

was so still and didn't speak to him, and he was afraid something was the matter with her. His eyes were very large—they resembled two luminous fire-balls—and I ran my hand through his soft hair to reassure him. I found she had fainted quite away, and threw some water in her face, which had been left in the parlor overnight, and she breathed again presently. Once she spoke:

"It seems as if the last great day had come. I am afraid Ida will be trampled to death. She got out of the carriage to help a poor woman."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "But Richard will surely find her," I said, a moment after.

The noise without grew louder and more ominous. It seemed as if a legion of demons had been let loose in the streets. Then there was a jar, like the one I had heard before, which stilled, or seemed to still, for an instant, the surging crowds. Could it be thunder, while the stars were shining?—for I had seen them a moment ago. No; it was gunpowder, and the terrible suspicion flashed upon me even then. Bright, peering through the lace on the vestibule-windows, saw blazing sparks and bits of burning wood light in our front-yard.

"Mamma, our house is catching! We must run! Come, come, come!" he screamed, tugging at my garments.

I looked out, and surely a wall of fire was advancing upon our midnight helplessness. Where, oh, where was Leonardus? Where was Mrs. Vance? What should I do with Mrs. Chafferlee? I put my two arms around Bright and groaned. But the man in him was not for standing there idle.

"Let me go for a carriage, mamma!"

"My boy, how could I let you out into that terrible street?" and so great was the roar and din, as if earth and sky were rushing to ruin together, that I had to raise my voice to be distinctly heard.

Bright put his face close to the window once more, and I stood looking through, just above him. The fire was tearing madly among the beautiful mansions not a block away. In different directions a dozen great sweeping scythes of flame seemed trying to outrun, and then made horrible dashes into each other. The swirls of smoke and sparks swept over the fire-chased throngs before our eyes. Frantic men were dragging bundles and trunks; women were running in their night-clothes; little children, with ghastly faces, were visible now and then, and afterward lost to our sight; trucks, filled with goods and people, and carriages, drawn by struggling, foaming horses, and lined with white, scared faces, were flying on, on, onward.

"Is it hell, mamma?—and will it overtake us anywhere, that you don't try to get away?" came from the philosophic little boy, and I had no answer to give in my terror-dazed despair.

What is that?—a carriage stopping? Who—yes, it is Leonardus! And I opened the door, admitting a volume of smoke and ashes and flying gravel into the hall, which nearly put out my eyes. He was already upon the steps; his hat was gone, a piece of blue mosquito-netting was tied over his forehead and eyes, and his coat was torn and dangling in shreds about him. I should have rushed into his arms with a cry of joy, but he put me back:

"Not a minute to lose, wifey. Catch something in your hands—what you care to save most—call the servants.—Bright, spring into the carriage.—I'll carry out Mrs. Chafferlee."

"What I care to save most!" I repeated to myself, as I flew wildly to my room. I opened a closet-door and took down an Astrakhan cloak and put it on, pulled the counterpane from the bed, spread it on the floor, and, from a bureau-drawer, pulled out a quantity of underwear, rolled it up, and, with the bundle in my hand, rushed down to the door. The wind took my bundle from me, and nearly twisted me over the railing of the steps. In a moment Leonardus had his arm firmly round my waist, and assisted me to the carriage. Maggie was there already, supporting Mrs. Chafferlee's head in her arms. Esther was waiting to get in, and was begging some one to go for her trunk. Bright came running with his cat and his dog, one under each arm, and his stamp-album in his hand. Last of all Leonardus pushed in my bundle, slammed the door—there was no room for him—and told Richard to drive to Mrs. Grant's, on Clark Street, about two miles farther north.

Great firebrands were falling all about us, and the horses reared, plunged, and snorted. At the very first move forward the wheels were interlocked with those of a heavy omnibus, and I thought we were going to be hopelessly broken down. Diagonally across the street a handsome three-story house was burning; and, looking back to see what had become of Leonardus, I was just in time to witness the huge serpent of hissing

flame which was springing from the roof of our own darling cottage. Where had it come from, and how could it have got there so soon? Ten minutes more, and only a pile of red-hot embers marked where our home had been. There were dense eddies of smoke all about us, which every now and then cleared away with brilliant scintillations. The moving figures appeared like imps of brimstone. Our terrified horses began to neigh, and it was with difficulty that they were urged along. I was more like one dead than living. I saw, and yet I felt that I saw not.

"Isn't that Miss Terrapin?" screamed Bright in my ears.

I looked the wrong way. He put his hand on my face, and turned it round to where two women were drawing another woman in a chair. But they were too far behind now for me to recognize them, even if they had been persons whom I knew.

"The lady with her beckoned to us, and threw out her arms, and I think she screamed," continued Bright.

"I suppose so—everybody screams," I replied.

I should not have spoken quite so mechanically if I had known that it was Mrs. Vance herself who had made a frantic effort to arrest the attention of her own coachman, and who was toiling along on foot, determined to save other life than her own, in the maddened crowd, with the great, blasting, scething, reeking sea of fire chasing and exhausting her.

Would the wilting wind never die? In one awful moment a bright blaze seemed to detach itself from the main

body and leaped over our heads, dropping down into the street about a block in advance, rendering the whole pathway a sea of flame. What should we do? To turn back was certain death. The side-streets were already blockaded. It was only go on. Richard applied the lash, and the excited animals tore through the passage. We bounded against vehicle after vehicle—once with such force that Bright was thrown against the glass in the carriage-window, breaking it.

Saved!—but stop, there is a wagon on fire loaded with mattresses, and a lady in her night-clothes leaping from it. She is all ablaze! Who will help her?

"Richard, Richard, leave your horses and run to her! No, some humane individual has anticipated you, and the fire about her person is extinguished. But stop, I say; let me call to her."

"Dear me, and you wouldn't carry my trunk, and the towels are in it that my good mother sent me all the way from Ireland!" growled Esther.

It was impossible to induce the horses to stand still, and a man, who could think of others as well as himself in that awful hour, took them by the head, and I seized the lady by her hand and drew her into the carriage with us.

"I don't know where you are going to get the room if you invite all the folks you pass to ride," continued the grumbling Esther.

"Let me curl down anywhere," cried the lady, with a frantic gesture.

Should we ever get to our haven? Cursing men, shrieking women, terrified horses, were everywhere impeding our progress. People, with heavy burdens, were constantly getting entangled with

wagons and carts and outcasts. Many ladies had put on their finery to save it; others, like myself, had grasped for the least important of all their possessions. Invalids were being borne on stretchers, old, gray-haired men were hobbling on crutches, feeble women were panting and fainting, and yet dragging themselves onward, sometimes clasping huge bundles. I saw one half grown girl carrying a drop-light, and a lady in a dressing-gown of chintz and a velvet cloak running with a tumbler of jelly in her hand. It was an extraordinary scene—horrible, ludicrous, mournful, and grotesque, as the visions of a nightmare.

We arrived at Mrs. Grant's house at last, and went in. They were packing and preparing to leave. There seemed to be no place for us there. I asked for something to wrap round the lady whom I had befriended, for the sun was up now and she had no clothes. I never knew when the sun came up, and I hardly recognized its fiendish face, constantly changing and making grimaces at our misery. Nor was it hardly lighter than when, in the night, I had first looked out into the firelit darkness. I knew that Mrs. Grant couldn't save every thing, and she might give the stranger a dress. I said so, and she told me to help myself to one, and I did. I found a pair of stockings, and a pair of gaiter-boots also, and a sea-shore hat. I looked in the lady's face while I was trying to draw her scorched and tangled hair out of her eyes, and saw that she was pretty and young—that is, if you call thirty young. I do. I don't know but I asked her who she was, for I did a good many things that day that I do not hold myself ac-

countable for; but, at all events, I learned that she was married only the week before in New York City, and was with her husband in Chicago on their wedding-trip. They were stopping at the Tremont, and had no time to dress after the first alarm that the hotel was in danger. They succeeded in getting themselves and their baggage conveyed to the corner of Rush and Indiana Streets; but the fire followed so rapidly that they were obliged to fly farther, and her husband disappeared. She did not know what became of him, and, after being jammed along with the crowd for a time, she managed to get between the mattresses on the wagon, from which she had narrowly escaped with her life into our carriage. Such was Mrs. Huberjide's experience.

But our terrible foe was opposed to our taking a rest. On, on it came, licking up the pretty cottages, and the blocks of brick and marble, and the stately churches, and the mammoth breweries, and the massive water-works, leaving only charred and blackened and smoking masses in its wake. How far must we be driven?—we, who were already six or seven miles from where it first started!

Leonardus came at last. I scarcely knew him, he looked so haggard and dirt-begrimed.

"Where did Richard go with the carriage?" he asked, breathlessly.

I did not know; I had taken no notice of the coachman after he had deposited Mrs. Chafferlee on Mrs. Grant's bed. I might have been more thoughtful, that is, if I had been anybody else but Medley Belmore.

"If he is hopelessly gone, then I must try to find some other way of removing you," exclaimed Leonardus, running out into the pitiless fire-storm.

"Where is General Belmore?—will he help us?—what is he going to do?" and similar questions, reached my ears from different members of Mrs. Grant's family, as I watched him running up and down, this way and that, jostling with the motley mass of fugitives on their fearful race for life, and, at last, leading a raw-boned, jaded mule up before the bay-window, with its fanciful drapery, from which I had seen agony and suffering enough depicted on the passing faces to have filled more books than the world could hold. A mule—what was he going to do with it? No matter where he had found it. Somebody said he took it forcibly from a boy, who had been left as its keeper. I should not be surprised if that was so, for civilities were only the exceptions, not the rule, on that day. Bright, dear, loving Bright—never was a boy more truly named—ran out to his father and was sent for Mrs. Grant's clothes-line. Then was manufactured a harness, such a one I am sure the world has never seen. A grocer's wagon, which had lost a wheel and been left to its fate in the middle of the street, was resuscitated through some manipulations with which I am not familiar, the mule fastened to it, a mattress of Mrs. Grant's laid in for the comfort of poor, distressed, but patient Mrs. Chafferlee, the rest of us huddled as compactly as possible, and with Leonardus to lead and coax the astonished and protesting mule, and Bright bringing up the rear with his cat and his dog, we joined the grand heira.

It was a wonder that we were not all smitten with total blindness from cinders and overwhelming dust. The wind was a hurricane, and we could scarcely hold fast enough to the wagon to keep from being blown from it; and it was doubtful whether the wagon, even, would hold together until we could be transported to a place of safety.

The prairie at last! And in a dry ditch by the side of the way we alighted, for both harness and wagon had failed. Night—tearful, illumined, tempestuous night—and the skies only for our covering; we who had until now been so well housed and cared for. The story of prairie-fires was fresh in our minds, for all over the West the woods were still burning, and the fiend was in sight, not so very far away. Might we hope to escape the still greater danger in store for us? Leonardus spoke hopefully and worked manfully. He was trying to hitch the fractious mule to the refractory wagon—and we awaited our fate.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FIRE ON THE SOUTH SIDE.

MEANWHILE where were our friends? I learned later, but my readers shall not be kept in suspense. When Leonardus and Dr. Gildersleeve reached the Sherman House the night before, people were in great excitement about the fire, which was on the west side, between De Koven and Polk Streets; and among the warped and weather-beaten shanties, where the streets were unpaved, and littered with old boxes, broken barrels, mildewed papers, and other tinder, as dry and crisp

as if they had been specially prepared for the occasion. Dr. Gildersleeve went to his rooms to look after the welfare of his wife and mother, and, finding them resting quietly, proposed to Leonardus to go and inspect the movements of the firemen, and see what progress the flames were making.

The sky was lighted up for miles around, and the river looked like a vast stream of blood. They went to the top of several large buildings, and finally proceeded southwestward as far as Van-Buren-Street bridge. The firemen were working like heroes, but the fire had got under headway and the winds were blowing a gale. The poor people, who were being made houseless with a rapidity which defies description, were throwing beds and all kinds of furniture from the windows of tenement-houses, into heterogeneous masses upon the sidewalks, obstructing the passage to and fro of the fire-companies, and preventing what little chance there was of staying the onward rush of the flames. Leonardus found the marshal of the fire department, and, after a brief consultation, telegraphed for him to some of the neighboring cities for immediate help. But, of course, it must come slowly. Fire-engines could not be telegraphed back. Milwaukee was the nearest point from which they could be obtained, and hours must elapse before they could arrive from there. Then Leonardus organized a body of men to work upon the roofs of buildings, and extinguish burning embers as they fell in advance of the fire, which had already lighted up the whole district, and was sweeping all before it into utter nothingness. But what

general could outgeneral the great potentate of the elements? Little fires were breaking out everywhere. There was a confusion of flame and smoke near the ground; while tall buildings, like islands of living fire, stood up, sending out their skirmishing parties to almost incredible distances. The firemen were baffled, because they never could reach the outskirts of the fire. Every time they moved back, and took a fresh position, the fire went over their heads and flanked them.

Meanwhile Dr. Gildersleeve was with the city authorities, counselling in matters of the gravest moment. In less than three hours over twenty blocks of buildings had been laid so low that no landmarks, save a few stunted chimneys, were left to tell where they once had been. The fire had spread more than a mile from its original starting-point, and was making straight for the heart of the city. Prompt measures for the transportation of gunpowder, and the blowing up of buildings, was the result of a collision between quick, decisive minds, and the work was not for an instant delayed.

The fire-bells clanged and clamored, and the church-bells put in their discordant tones. People ran into the streets to see, then through the streets without object or aim. Some ran because others ran, and some stood looking up into the red heavens, which also seemed on fire. The clouds, driven past by the gale, were like masses of angry flame-bearers of destruction. And still the fire kept on, coiling itself round building after building, like a venomous serpent greedy of its prey. Great lumber-yards disappeared like dissolving-

views, and the freight-depots of the Chicago and St. Louis, the Pittsburg and Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroads, were swept of every vestige of an outline.

Don't let it cross the river!—work my brave boys!—turn the bridges! Hal! they are on fire already, as they stand there in the middle of the stream pointing up and down. But, don't let it catch on the other shore—work! Steady at the helm! Put out the firebrands as they fall—work, I say! The demon is reaching over, and trying to thwart your efforts—he is throwing missiles into dangerous places. There!—see!—he has got foothold! The wooden buildings adjoining the gas-works are blazing. Oh, oh, oh!—The gas-house itself has gone, and the great city is lighted only by the fires with which it is being consumed!

People ran madly, crowds meeting crowds, and each in their fright trying to push their way through each, and many were trampled to death in the desperation of the moment. The vessels in the river took fire one after another in quick succession, the masts and spars falling like rain-drops in a shower, while, at the same time, the fire streamed along eastward, swallowed the great Michigan Southern Railroad depot, and innumerable blocks of large and small buildings around it, and the body of flame presented a front of half a semi-circle, behind which was a crackling, raging, roaring hell of half a mile in depth. Nothing material could stand the surge of this tremendous sea. The panic-stricken and distracted mob were almost as terrible to behold as the roaring conflagration. They ran toward Lake and South Water Streets, and upon the

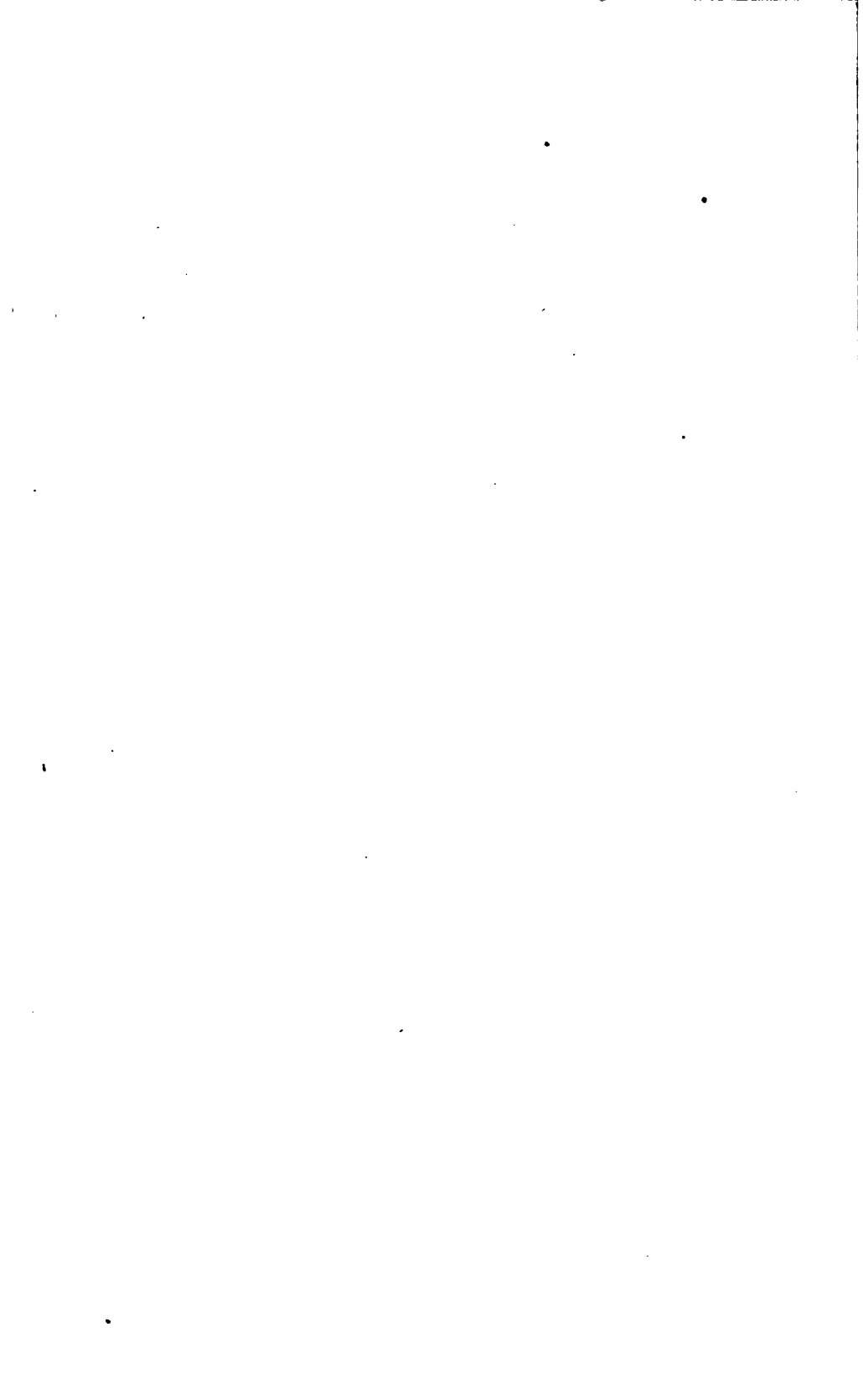
bridges, and then turned at bay like affrighted animals.

When Leonardus saw that the ocean of flame was irresistibly whelming every thing, and all reliance upon human succor was over, he hurried to the Sherman House to assist Dr. Gildersleeve in moving his helpless ones to the north side, not thinking even then that we were doomed. They met on the stairs and ran up together, encountering as they did so the hotel guests running down in every stage of dress and undress, and dragging trunks after them. Dr. Gildersleeve found Mrs. Hortense paralyzed with fright, and the nurse and his wife both gone! Mrs. Hortense could give very little account of what had happened. Helen had risen up and walked to the window, when she had not taken a step for years before, and, without speaking a word, had rushed from the room. The nurse had followed her, and neither of them had returned. Mrs. Hortense did not think that Helen could have possibly got out of the house, for, even if any unnatural strength had come to her in the terror and excitement of the moment, it would not be likely to have carried her far. Dr. Gildersleeve hastened to explore the hotel, while Leonardus assisted Mrs. Hortense to get a few garments wrapped about her preparatory to leaving. Dr. Gildersleeve ran back to say:

“Dear general, can you take care of Mrs. Hortense? I think I have got trace of Helen,” and was gone.

Mrs. Hortense could not walk, and Leonardus lifted her in his arms. He did not dream the danger was so near. As he was passing out of the door, a







"General Belmore carrying Mrs. Hortense through Dearborn Street."

lighted piece of flooring, about the size of a butler's tray, was hurled through the window into the room just vacated, and the hotel was speedily hissing from every crack and corner. Down the stairs he flew with his burden, out the door, tried to stop a hack, hailed a flying omnibus, yelled to the driver of a one-horse dray, loaded with men and women; saw no way but to run, and kept running. A wreath of fire rushed up Clark Street after him. He thought the pavements were on fire, but he learned afterward that they were all intact. He reached Lake Street, could see that Clark-Street bridge was turned or broken, and made for State-Street bridge; but great fiery balls were rushing through the sky, lighting up roofs and cornices a full half-mile in advance. Good Heavens! — he discovered fires on the north side, and all around, and near State-Street bridge. Fearing he should be cut off in that direction, he turned westward, hoping to get through La-Salle-Street tunnel. The stampede was sickening. Men and horses were jammed into each other, women and children bruised and bleeding, and, with clothes nearly torn from their bodies, were screaming and moaning. All distinctions of class or nationality were lost; every life was dear to its possessor. Lake Street, with its long mile of glitter and show and costly warehouses, and wealth of goods, was in the jaws of the hungry monster. The flames were already overlapping South Water Street, the great wholesale centre, where seven-storied mines of riches stretched over another mile. What could a man, however strong and powerful physically, do with a helpless, groaning woman in

his arms? Should he push into that fearful hole underground? If he had been alone he would not have stopped to question, but could his burden ever be taken through alive? He made the attempt. There were no policemen to clear the way; every man must do his own pushing. Policemen had homes and wives and children, like other men. They had run to save them, too, like other men. But how was this knot of subterranean misery ever to be extricated? Leonardus saw one man trying to drag three little children through in a garbage-barrel. They were pinned fast against the wall by entangled humanity. The air was like a furnace seven times heated. He was losing time; he had been losing time ever since he started from the Sherman House. One great, mighty effort, and he crossed Wells-Street bridge. He never could remember how it was accomplished. It seemed as if he had been lifted upon the human wave, and tossed over. And then he made for Kinzie-Street bridge, to get Mrs. Hortense into some secure place to windward of the flames. Fighting against the whirlwind of ashes and smoke, he at last reached the west side, dropped Mrs. Hortense at the first respectable house he could find, and scarcely had turned to fly to our relief, when he blundered upon Richard, and Mrs. Vance's carriage, and learned how he had tried to get back for his mistress and found it impossible.

Spicy, in her elegant mansion on Michigan Avenue, was alone with her three little children and three servants. She had retired at her usual hour, and slept peacefully until awakened sometime after midnight by her husband's

book-keeper from the office, who told her what frightful progress the fire was making, and inquired if he had better unlock the safe and take out the contents.

"Certainly," replied Spicy; "I will go and do it myself."

"You! Oh, no!" and he remonstrated with great earnestness.

But she had not asked for advice, nor would she have been likely to have asked it of him, a mere boy, in her estimation. She dressed quickly, and ran to the barn herself to order her coachman to harness the horses, and bring them round to the door without a moment's delay. He was astonished, stared in the direction of the horrible fire, and declared he could not drive her gay team on such a night.

"Do as I bid you," was all she said, and ran back to the house to complete her arrangements.

Her cook was her most reliable servant, and it was she who was commanded to get ready to accompany the brave woman. The book-keeper might do as he liked, go or not go; if he went, it must be under her guidance. He sprang into the carriage with her, and they were whirled rapidly toward the scene of destruction.

"We cannot get any farther on Madison Street," called the driver down through the glass, stopping his horses at the corner of State.

"Drive on!" fell firmly from the lips of the little woman behind him, and he obeyed.

Down into Madison Street, amid the deafening roar of the furies, and the ceaseless thud of falling walls!—the horses, meanwhile, neighing in mortal terror, striking the pavements wildly

with their hoofs, and foam falling from their mouths in showers. Spicy sat erect and motionless as a statue of marble, not blind to the danger, not unmoved by what she saw and heard, but with one sole purpose in view, and spirit enough to put it in execution. The heat was so intense that their progress was not retarded by frenzied fugitives. The large buildings on the south side of Madison Street had already taken fire; a few daring men only ran along the sidewalk at intervals, and paused to scream into the carriage:

"You are a fool, madam! Back out of here!"

In front of her husband's office Spicy sprang from the carriage pulling the afghan after her, ran up the stairs, followed by Nora and the book-keeper, and in a twinkling the ponderous door of the immense safe swung open and a portion of the contents were hastily piled upon the carriage-robe, and the three caught hold of it and conveyed it to the carriage. The coachman was holding the terrified horses by the heads, and there was danger of their breaking away from him.

"Hire any one who comes along to help you hold them, and I will pay him his price," said Spicy, looking up at the bridge of fire over her, measuring her moments, and making a second trip to the office.

When they brought down their next cargo of books and ledgers in the carriage-robe, six men were hanging at the horses' heads.

"We shall all burn—the carriage will burn!" shouted the coachman.

"Take it to the corner of State Street, and I will meet you there," said Spicy.

"Don't go up again, madam!" yelled several voices, all in one breath.

But she had gone, and the awe-stricken servant and book-keeper had followed her.

It was the last time the carriage-robe was filled, and the three bore it to the corner of State Street, where they found the carriage, but with this last accession it was so full that Spicy could not get in herself. She paid the men ten dollars each who had helped to hold her horses, and then sent the driver with the valuables to the house of a friend in the extreme southern portion of the city. She did not think her own house was going to burn, but it was better that what she had saved should be elsewhere taken care of.

Then she started on her walk home. Wabash Avenue was a dense mass of human beings. Hackmen were the monarchs of the occasion, and were driving furiously without regard to life and limb, gentle breeding, tender sex, or the more potent influence of the star of the order of the guardians of public safety. There were none of the white-gloved gentry at the street-corners to help her over; but she reached the other side in safety, thanks to a kind, protecting Providence, and ran against Miss Terrapin. She was surprised, that is, if such a tame emotion as surprise could be mentioned with such scenes. Miss Terrapin was laden with bundles and a basket, had started for Spicy's house, frightened from her rooms on Lake Street by the near approach of the fire. They went on together, walking fast and speaking rapidly, and, when about half-way between Wabash and Michigan Avenues, both came near stum-

bling over a lady who had fallen upon her face upon the sidewalk.

"Poor thing!" said Spicy, stopping to raise her.

Miss Terrapin handed her bundles to Nora, and took hold of the other arm of the lady, and, assisting herself a little, she came to her feet. But she sank backward directly, and would have fallen again, had they not together caught her in their arms. Her face now was toward the west, and the crimson glare lit up every feature. Spicy and Miss Terrapin looked at each other at the same instant with a flash of intelligence and recognition mingled with horror. It was the same that had looked at them eight years before, from the closet of the blue-room in the old Dwight mansion!

It was a face that could not be forgotten. It was thin and emaciated then, it was thinner and more emaciated now, but still the same. The hair was dark and long then, it was white and short now, but the contour of that high, strange forehead remained, and impressed the mind just the same as before. The eyes emitted the same vivid lightnings, and the hands, which clung to their arms, were but too easily identified.

"My ghost!—after all these years," said Spicy, with compassion instead of fear in her voice.

The eyes came near consuming her, and then a harsh, hoarse response:

"You stole my letters!"

Miss Terrapin trembled, and would have dropped the woman but for Spicy's hold on her. The book-keeper had lent his slight strength to save her from falling, also, when he saw the two were unequal to the task.

"Who are you?" asked Spicy.

"Those were my letters, and you stole them and read them," she said again.

"What is your name?" persisted Spicy.

"Queen Dido!" and a maniacal laugh rang out above the awful sounds with which the air was filled.

"What do your friends call you?" Spicy was unruffled, but determined.

"I have no friends. I am going to the water over there; it is boiling—don't you see it?—I am going to take a warm bath," and she laughed again.

"What shall I call you? Lucy? or Maria? or Jane?" and Spicy's voice was entreating.

"I am not going to tell you. You stole my letters!—I wanted them, and you wouldn't let me have them. They were my Grandison's letters, and I loved him and every scrap of paper he ever laid his hand upon. Let me go. I am thirsty—I want water. Do you see that chariot of fire?"

"I know her—it is my sister Helen! Help me; we must try to carry her home," said Spicy.

"I your sister Helen; I thought I was your ghost!" screamed the maniac.

"Your husband is Rev. Dr. Grandison Gildersleeve—isn't he?" Spicy asked, quietly, "and I am his brother Fred's wife."

"What business have you to speak his name? You stole my letters!—I went for them, and you called me a ghost. But I wanted them, they were my letters."

"How did you get into that closet?" asked Spicy.

"Through the little window. It had

a slide, and you could not find it. I wanted the letters! I loved Grandison. I knew it was wrong to marry him, but you shall not accuse me. You stole my letters! I knew I was going to be a crazy wife. My father was crazy before me, but we never told him. I had been in an asylum twice, but we kept the secret—mother and I—because I loved him, and mother said he would forgive me. He has forgiven me so grandly, that my conscience has set the world on fire. When I am once in the water it will be put out—let me go!"

She struggled to free herself, but she had little strength, and they succeeded in carrying her to the corner of Michigan Avenue. The street was packed with people, like all the other streets, and painfully illumined. It was easy, therefore, for them to distinguish Mrs. Vance's carriage as it picked its way along, and for Mrs. Vance to recognize Spicy and Miss Terrapin on the sidewalk. She drew up immediately and got out, for the din was too great for her to talk with them from the window of her carriage. A few brief explanations from Spicy, aided by her ready intelligence, and the whole immediate difficulty was mastered.

That part of Michigan Avenue where they both lived might not burn. It hardly seemed probable, with the wind in the present direction, that it would. But it was best to be prepared. Mrs. Vance was taking her sick aunt Mary over to General Belmore's for quiet, as well as safety, and was then coming back herself to await results. She thought Mrs. Gildersleeve had better be removed there also. But, as she had improvised

a sort of bed in the carriage, she thought it would hardly be best to disturb Aunt Mary by trying to force the wretched lunatic in against her will, so proposed to stay with her herself until the carriage should return.

"You know your sister Meddie will do every thing for Aunt Mary if I am not with her, and I will take this poor lady there myself," she said.

"Miss Terrapin, you will stay with Mrs. Vance, I am sure; we will take all your things and take care of them," said Spicy.

She signified her assent, and Mrs. Vance begged of Spicy to hurry to her darling babies, and make it her first business to transport them to some other portion of the city.

After waiting a few moments where they were, and finding their burden sinking heavily, Mrs. Vance asked Miss Terrapin to go to her house and bring one of the light easy-chairs from her library. They placed Mrs. Gildersleeve in it, and dragged her gently along toward Rush-Street bridge, watching eagerly for the carriage, which they momentarily expected. But, as they advanced northward, they came more directly into the vein of the fire-tempest. They did not progress fast, for it was with agonizing delays, and at the risk of their lives, that they could cross the side-streets, which were pouring their overwhelming numbers upon Michigan Avenue. The carriage must come soon! Before they were aware of the possibility of such a thing, they were hemmed in by the frightened multitudes who were being driven toward Rush-Street bridge. For, suddenly, a great, expanding scythe of flame was

reaching over and around and beyond them, mowing immense and increasing swaths with alarming rapidity, and now and then sending columns of smoke and blaze hundreds of feet into the air, like solid and perpendicular shafts of molten metal. The mighty rush toward the north side had set in, and they could no more turn back. They were launched forth on a journey, the extent or the end of which defied the power of human calculations.

Spicy commenced packing as soon as she got home. And yet she did not believe her house was going to burn. When her carriage returned, she sent her children, with their nurse, to the house of the same friend who had just received her possessions from the office. The next thing was to try to open a safe, which stood in a recess at the end of the front-hall. It was a combination lock, and she could not remember the number. She knew it, but in the excitement it had gone from her. She spent some time over it, and finally sent the book-keeper to the telegraph-office to get a message to her husband in New York, asking for the simple figure, but he found the building roaring like an army of lions, and, after spending an hour or two in a vain effort to find to what point the apparatus had been removed, returned unsuccessful.

Meanwhile the carriage returned after the safe deposit of the little ones, and she filled it with paintings and books and silver, and sent it forth again; but it came back to her no more. They were preparing to blow up buildings on the avenue below, for the fire had swooped round, and was sweeping all before it

now toward the south, and vehicles were not allowed to come up from that direction. Adieu to hope, and all fancied security; Spicy's beautiful home must go!

That safe!—if she could only get it open. Impossible; but if she could get it to the front-door, and roll it down the steps, it would not melt when the building should come to fall. She stopped some men who were passing. Yes, they would do it for fifty dollars. The city was burning, and they must have their pay in advance. Spicy paid them. They worked at the safe for a few minutes, pulled it an inch or two, swore at Spicy for having made them try to kill themselves, and then went away! She hired a wagon to carry a load of furniture. Twenty-five dollars the man asked. Money first, furniture afterward. Spicy gave him the required sum. Her elegant parlor suite was put upon the wagon, but just then a man came running and offered the driver fifty dollars to take a load for him. Off went the goods upon the sidewalk, and away went the wagon. Spicy set to work at once with what help she could muster, and carried her treasures across the avenue upon the lake shore. It was a perilous undertaking, for every kind of vehicle was jammed in there. The fire, too, was close at hand. It had lapped up the Clifton and the Palmer House, as well as miles and miles of other magnificent buildings, and was whirling in great lurid eddies around the block just above. Spicy had succeeded in getting out many things; most of her carpets were on the water's edge, also bundles of clothing—she had rejected trunks as being too cumbersome—

beds, books, and crockery. She was running from a chamber with an armful of her husband's apparel, and was about to give it to Nora to convey across the street, when three or four vicious-looking men entered, and deliberately took the things from her and commenced trying on coats, vests, etc. She observed them for a moment quietly, then, with no apparent agitation, said:

"You are welcome to those clothes. I don't suppose I can save them. But I do protest against the way in which you are appropriating them."

They looked confounded, and one after another sneaked away with their booty. The last was a bloated Irishman, and, as he turned to look at Spicy the second time, she recognized our old moving man of May, 1862, and the subsequent robber.

Oh, that safe! It was Spicy's last tie. If she could only get it rolled out. The house was already on fire in the rear. What should she do? Must it be left to its certain fate?

A quick, rapid step through the hall, heard above the turmoil of the elements. She turned:

"Oh, brother Grandison!"

"My child! you must leave this place instantly. Is there a last thing I can do for you?"

"This safe, if it could only be rolled out the front-door. It does seem as if it might be done."

He caught hold of it; it moved. Spicy caught hold with him—a fly might as well have lent its aid. The book-keeper applied all his energies; he never knew before that he had so many. Nora pulled a few scattered articles out of the way,



and then got in the way herself. Bridget screamed: "Hurry, hurry!—the house is falling!" She had felt the hall-floor settle, for the safe was under way—it was almost to the door. Another push, another pull—another, and still another strain of strong arms and stronger wills—there, it is at the threshold!—it is over! Crash, crash, crash! It has taken the handsome stone steps with it; but what of that, it cannot melt now! Fred Gildersleeve's fortune is saved—and it has been saved by his wife!

But the fire, the merciless fire, had closed in upon them. Dr. Gildersleeve leaped over the ruins of the steps, and helped Spicy down. The others followed, but whither should they fly? They seemed to be enveloped in a sort of reverberatory furnace, like that employed to melt metallic ores. There was fire to the right of them, there was fire to the left of them, there was fire behind them, and there was fire over their heads. The torrid heats, and the lurid lights, had blotted out the sky. There was nothing left them but the lake. They ran down to its very edge. Dr. Gildersleeve, with the aid of the book-keeper, dipped one of the carpets into the water, and spread it over Spicy and her women; but, one blast of that raging sirocco, and it was dry and scorched like an ironing-sheet. He jumped into the water himself to extinguish the little fires which had caught in his shirt-bosom, and hair, and neck, and to prevent the heavy cloth of which his clothes were made from kindling. The book-keeper, blinded and frantic, jumped in also; but, while Dr. Gildersleeve sprang back on shore, and seized the drawer of a cabinet—the

first thing that came in his way—and dipped and threw water with all his might and main to keep the carpet wet, the young man, being a fair swimmer, worked his way along in the water and made his escape at Harrison Street.

Imagine, if you can, the most blinding snow-storm that ever was known, and the snow not snow but fire! Imagine yourself trying to breathe in it on a narrow point between an angry blaze—an ocean of blaze, I might say—and a murky sea. And even then you will only vaguely realize what Dr. Gildersleeve encountered in his hand-to-hand fight with the powers of the air. Repeating his own baths every other moment, and throwing water upon the carpets with the desperation of a madman, he wore away the time until the huge walls near by had toppled to the ground, and the waves of death had rolled on. Spicy had saved a fortune—Dr. Gildersleeve had averted the still greater calamity, loss of life.

There was rest; but such rest! Fierce fires in every direction. Eyes blistered and blinded and stinging, and smoke and ashes enveloping them like a cloud. Dr. Gildersleeve sat down and looked at Spicy, who had withstood so much and so courageously. She was exhausted, half suffocated, but not overpowered.

"I am so glad Fred was not here," was her first remark.

"Why?" asked Dr. Gildersleeve.

"Because he would have been killed in trying to help everybody," she said.

Dr. Gildersleeve smiled.

"He would have kept his wife out of danger if he could, I fancy; but where are your children?"

"Safe, unless the fire never stops."

And Spicy gave him a history of her night.

"Poor Helen! how I thank you for your kindness to her! How fortunate that your friend was just in time to take her away in a carriage, beyond the reach of danger! But the fire is raging on the north side; they will have to flee miles, I fear."

"Brother Grandison, did you ever board in the old Dwight mansion, that odd little cottage which once stood on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Madison Street?"

"Yes, for a few weeks in the spring of 1862. We went from there to the Clifton, just back of it, on the corner of Wabash Avenue and Madison Street. Why?"

Spicy told him the ghost-story, and Helen's recent allusions to the letters, withholding the fact, however, that she had ever seen and read the documents.

"Now I understand to what Helen referred, when she persisted in talking about her *lost letters*. I supposed it part and parcel of her disordered fancy. I missed her several times late in the evening, and once or twice at midnight, and was obliged to put extra bolts upon my doors. And you recognized each other—how singular!"

"Don't you think we can get down the avenue by this time? I must go to my children."

"Not, my child, while Terrace block is burning. Look, look!—it is going over. Every thing is on a pretty general level now. Be patient, little one, we cannot help ourselves yet." And

then he went on and told her of his search for Helen, after she had escaped from her mother at the hotel. Some one in the office had noticed her as she passed by, so that he knew that she was in the street. She had on a dressing-gown of blue silk, which she usually wore in bed, and he hoped to distinguish her easily. He was confident that her strength would not carry her far, but, from various attempts which she had made to burn herself in the past, he searched for her in the direction of the fire. He believed she would approach it until prostrated by the heat. He groped along the red-hot pavements, peered into every dark corner through all the multitudinous streets and alleys, and only moved backward as he was driven by the fire-fiend. Passing along Dearborn Street, he ran against an old man, who was standing by a broad-paned window looking in upon a rare and valuable collection of paintings, the accumulation of many years of patient toil. He was groaning, as if in anguish of spirit.

"What is the matter, my good sir?"

"Have you a key?—oh, sir, have you a key that you think will fit this door? I have left mine in the pocket of my week-day pantaloons at my home over on the west side, and it will take me better than an hour to get it here. The building may burn before that time, and, oh, it is my all!"

"Those pictures are yours—are they?"

"Yes, indeed, and the finest stock in the city. What shall I do?"

"Break through the glass, and take them out!—or yonder messenger will

break the glass for you, and wind up your business at the same time."

The man's face brightened. He had not thought of such a rude way of entering the building. A few moments later Dr. Gildersleeve passed that way again, and saw him piling his pictures upon an express-wagon.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### MRS. VANCE'S FOUR-MILE FLIGHT.

AND what of Mrs. Vance and Miss Terrapin, and their unfortunate charge? They had crossed Rush-Street bridge, borne along by the billows of that hideous, howling mob. They had been trampled, jostled, jammed. The bridge had turned while they were upon it, to let a schooner into the lake, and they had been overrun by the mad attempts of the multitude to jump upon her decks. Clinging to each other, and to the framework of the bridge, they had seen more than one person go down to a watery grave. Helen Gildersleeve had there made a frantic effort to free herself from her captors, and reach the coveted waters. Once she had nearly succeeded, and but for Mrs. Vance's wonderful presence of mind in interposing her arm, and grasping the shoulder of a little girl in the crowd just beyond, she would have been lost to them forever.

"Oh, ma'am, don't pinch me; you'll make me drop my birdie!" implored the little one, who was clinging fast to a precious cage.

Mrs. Vance reassured her, and just then a full-sized man jerked the chair

from under the invalid, striking Miss Terrapin, who was bending over her, in the head with such force as to blind her for a few moments, and send her bonnet and wig spinning over the railing out of sight. The man wanted the chair to drag a lady in himself, but the little girl was indignant, and with her free hand seized him by the coat-tail, and a brawny negro, whom she called John, wrenched it away from its purloiner and restored it to Mrs. Vance. A great firebrand fell in the middle of the bridge upon a white-haired man, who was being drawn by two women on a billiard-board, with his head downward. Then another fell in a cart, which contained some combustible material, and a bright blaze shot up all about them. The scene was terrific. There were so many vessels and tugs trying to get through, that it seemed as if the bridge never would close. It did at last, and was left burning behind them. Buildings were burning everywhere on the north side too. They ran, hotly pursued; they paused, took breath, and then ran again. People ran by them, leaped over them, struck them with trunks and pieces of furniture in passing. They could not get on as fast as others, because of their heavy burden. They were driven from square to square, along those miles and miles of interminable streets and avenues, always dragging the helpless lunatic in the chair. Hour after hour, and still the relentless fire chased, hissed in their ears, and spit horribly suggestive cinders upon their heads and necks.

Mrs. Vance had thrown a water-proof around her when she started out in the night, and it proved her salvation. It

not only saved her from getting on fire innumerable times, but it was the means by which she extinguished the flames which were constantly lighting the clothing of Miss Terrapin and Helen Gildersleeve. That great, hateful, fiery-looking ball in the heavens, which kept getting higher and higher, and which could be seen as the clouds of smoke cleared at intervals, telegraphed that it was mid-day. Then the day was waning, but not the fire. On, on it came, with a fury that is beyond the power of language. And on, on ran the two women, dragging the other woman in the chair. Once they took refuge in a cemetery. But the fire found them, and drove them on. The marble over the graves cracked and baked, and fell in glowing embers on the hot turf. Every inscription was obliterated, wherever the skeleton of a tombstone was left. The great receiving-vault, solidly built and shrouded with foliage, was attacked, and the dead bodies burst from their coffins as the fire tore through the walls.

What a day to remember! And each participant in that chapter of miseries has a story to tell, which will thrill their children's and their children's children's hearts to the remotest generation! May history never have such another to record!

No rest, no peace until they were hidden within the confines of Lincoln Park, without food, and the stars and the fire-clouds their only shelter. Mrs. Vance dropped on her knees, and thanked God for having brought them through so many dangers. Then she stroked the forehead devoid of mind, and tenderly kissed it.

The tumult and the roar had given place to a terrible silence. Seventy thousand people were huddled together. The delicate woman, the high-bred dame, the haughty banker, the revered clergyman, the tender infant, the hardy laborer, and the worst denizens of the worst localities. Now and then the air was rent with moans. Children cried for bread sometimes; but, exhaustion had absorbed fear, and many slept. Over others the settled quiet of deep, dull despair reigned supreme. They looked at each other as if their minds were far away. Some covered their faces and wept.

As the night air cooled and then chilled them, Mrs. Vance wound her water-proof about Mrs. Gildersleeve. That easy-chair had proved a faithful friend. It had worn out its legs in the service of its mistress, had come apart in the back, and its cushions were riddled as with bullets. But it was far better than the wet earth for an invalid. Mrs. Gildersleeve slept, while Mrs. Vance and Miss Terrapin watched. It was a quiet, marvellous sleep for one who had been raving all day. If they could only get her some food!

An old market-woman came along munching some cake, and sat down on the ground near them.

"Can you give me a little, just a crumb, for this sick lady here?" asked Mrs. Vance.

She had a compassionate face, that baked, fire-scarred woman; that is, a compassionate heart shone from it, and she put her hand in a dirty bag, which hung by her side, and produced a handful of crackers and gave Mrs. Vance,

who could hardly repress her tears of gratitude.

"I have no money here, but tell me your name, and I will some day reward you," she said.

"She is a very rich lady," Miss Terrapin remarked to the woman.

Ah! she had been a rich lady, but where were her riches now?

Helen Gildersleeve opened her eyes after a while, and Mrs. Vance tried to induce her to taste a cracker. She shook her head, and kept her mouth closed firm; she looked around as if she could not comprehend the weird, strange scene, the red glare cityward, the dark heavens above. Presently it began to rain. Mrs. Vance drew the hood of the water-proof down to shield the invalid's face, but she pushed it away.

"Where are we—what is all this?" she asked.

Mrs. Vance explained as well as she was able, and the hot, hollow eyes seemed to burn out the darkness between them, and turn into fire as they were fixed on her.

"And who are you?—an angel from heaven?" she asked, after having listened quietly for some time.

"Oh, no! A child of this world, very human and very hungry," was the reply.

"And yet you eat nothing, and try to put crackers in my mouth. I don't want them. I can't live if I do eat; I have never lived; I have only been a torment to every one whom I have best loved. Bring your face down nearer, I want to see your blue eyes. Grandison loved a lady once who had blue eyes—they must have been like yours. She

married another man. She was the cause of all his misery, else he would not have taken me and been cursed. Will you call Grandison?—I am dying, and I want him! He has been so kind; never a word nor a look of reproach all these long years. I must tell him how I deceived him!—I cannot die without telling him. It was because I loved him—I had no pity in my heart, it was all love—and now it has kindled a hell in the middle of a city! I might have known it would."

She had exhausted herself, and fell back listlessly, with closed eyes. Mrs. Vance changed the position of the chair, so that on her knees she could support the feeble head, and thus managed with her uplifted arm to shield the pale face with the hood of the water-proof.

"Do you think she is dying?" whispered Miss Terrapin, excitedly.

"I fear so—and yet, who can tell? Let her sleep, it may revive her."

There were groups of people near them. There was one man who walked up and down, like a sentinel on duty. His head rested upon his breast, and sometimes he counted aloud. Once or twice words like *dividend* and *insurance* fell upon the night air. He wore no hat, and the rain pattered upon his head. He kept up the steady tramp for hours, swaying to the right and left in his gait sometimes. At last he blundered against Miss Terrapin, who was on her knees by Mrs. Vance. The accident recalled him to himself, and he apologized. Mrs. Vance looked up, and he looked down into her eyes, bent lower and lower, as if doubting his own senses.

"Ah! Dr. Greer," said she.

He straightened himself immediately.

"I little thought of meeting you here," came sadly from his lips.

His voice aroused Mrs. Gildersleeve.

"Is it Grandison?"

"No; but it is a friend," said Mrs. Vance, soothingly.

"Will he go for Grandison?—ask him."

"To whom does she refer?" inquired Dr. Greer.

"Rev. Dr. Gildersleeve. Do you know him?" inquired Mrs. Vance.

"Know him!—ask a Chicago man if he knows Dr. Gildersleeve! Do I know there has been a fire? Excuse me, madam; yes, I do know him, and I honor and respect him, too, more than almost any other man whom it has been my lot to know in Chicago."

"This sick lady here is his wife," said Mrs. Vance.

"Is it possible!"

Dr. Greer regarded her sadly.

"She is very low, and, as you were once a physician, perhaps you can instruct us how to make the most of our slender resources for her comfort. A cup of tea, some slight nourishment, or a tonic, seems imperative."

"Nothing—call Grandison!" whispered the invalid.

But Dr. Greer had taken a tonic which roused him to action. The voice of the woman, whom he loved and admired above all others, had put mettle into his bones, and he was prepared to do her bidding. He forgot his stocks and profits and losses, and remembered that somewhere over toward the lake he had seen a woman trying to make a tea-kettle boil over embers from the burning

city. Away he ran as fast as his short legs could carry him, spreading himself, however, at full length over some snoring sleepers before he had accomplished a dozen rods in his haste and the darkness. But he was agile as if sixteen, instead of sixty, and was up and on. He ran against a little girl with such force that he knocked her down, and, stooping to help her up, was hindered by her despairing clutch.

"Oh, tell me where papa and mamma are!"

All kinds of household goods were on the ground; they were tumbled about everywhere. Dr. Greer was impatient with the many obstacles in the way of his progress. A man, stooping to minister to some sufferer, he leaped directly over, having gained so much momentum before seeing him that he could not stop. On, on to the destined point.

Yes, the woman had a little hot water; her old man had brought it all the way from the lake. She had been making tea. Wouldn't give him a drop, not she. "Folks must take care of themselves, and bring their own tea!" How could she feed all the rich folks and their grand ladies? She was good as the 'ristocrats now; they would know how it felt to be poor, she guessed. What was that she saw?—a five-dollar bill! Was the gentleman really offering her a five-dollar bill for a cup of tea?

"Take it, Janey!" whispered the owner of a pair of covetous eyes, in the darkness behind her.

"Well, yes; I don't mind accommodating, but I can't throw the cup in. I didn't save but two or three, and cups will be high now there's been so many burned.

No, wouldn't trust you to bring it back; don't know who is honest or who ain't. Two dollars!—is that it? I can't see very well. Never mind about the cup, I always like to do favors!" and, with seven dollars less in his pocket, Dr. Greer steadied a dingy cup of villanous-looking dark fluid in his hand, as he picked his uncertain and rainy way back to the ladies. Mrs. Vance used every effort to persuade Mrs. Gildersleeve to sip even one swallow, but in vain. Then Dr. Greer, with a grim smile, declared that the nurses should obey him if the patient would not; and Mrs. Vance and Miss Terrapin, with their crackers to help choke it down, divided the horrid stuff between them.

Meanwhile Dr. Greer borrowed some bed-blankets from a pile of goods, which was guarded by a small boy fast asleep, and the ladies were wrapped up and in a measure protected from the storm. Helen Gildersleeve was again slumbering. How they all prayed for the day to dawn! Dr. Greer felt her pulse, and shook his head. What could be done? Where go for help, when there was no help? The city was burned!

The rain came faster, and he took off his coat and held it over Mrs. Vance. She forbade his doing so, and he put his coat on again with a sigh. Then the rain subsided, and a heavy mist settled over them. Mrs. Gildersleeve struggled, and begged for air. Dr. Greer assisted Mrs. Vance in raising her partially, but the movement distressed her, and they were obliged to lay her back again. All at once she opened her eyes, and the light of reason seemed to spring from them.

"I am dying, and Grandison is not

here!—tell him how I wanted him! Oh, if I could but hear his voice in prayer once more! I used to mock him when he prayed, and I drove him from his church and people! Will you ask him if he truly forgave me?—and say I loved him, will you? Who, oh, who will pray for me? Will you?" And her quick, inquiring gaze was riveted upon Mrs. Vance's face, a face wan and worn just then, but, for all of youth's lost bloom, a face full of beauty which years could not ruin.

"Dear one, I will," was the touching answer.

And such a prayer as welled from her lips has rarely ever been heard. The sufferer listened like one afraid of losing jewels beyond price. She was grasping Mrs. Vance's hand, and pressing it to her heart. The strong man dropped on his knee; he had been a praying man all his life, but prayer was unfolding a new meaning to him now. When we are strong and well, and the needs of life come freely at our bidding, and we lie down to sleep in the full assurance of a peaceful and fortunate morrow, the tongue is apt to syllable its supplications very glibly, and it is easy to fancy a perfect measure of trust and confidence in the Father of all mercies. But when we are shut in as with a clasp-knife from every thing dear, it is no idle faith if sufficient to bear the test. It was a solemn and strangely-impressive scene—the occasion, the circumstances, the hour, the stillness, and the low, clear, steady voice, which was leading all present into a nearer, tenderer relation with the Ruler of events. There were tears coursing down cheeks unused to tears, and there were choking sobs back in the darkness,

for strangers had been creeping close to catch the words.

"Thank you—God bless you; I am better now!" And Helen Gildersleeve never spoke afterward. She lay as if in a calm sleep, breathing fainter and fainter. Dr. Greer and Mrs. Vance watched every pulse-beat. Suddenly there was a pause—her spirit had taken its final flight.

At about the same hour we had landed in a far-away prairie-farmer's home. But for Mrs. Chafferlee, Leonardus would have allowed us to remain on the roadside, as we begged of him. But the exposure was sapping the fountains of her life, and he made herculean exertions to reconstruct our equipage. At last we were once more on the highway to shelter. I don't know how far we had proceeded when Leonardus left his mule to adjust a spoke in the wheel, and the mule left us. I suppose he had got tired of such an unusual day's work, and concluded that his best friends were his worst enemies. At all events, he had freed himself from his novel harness and disappeared.

"Not much of a loss. I believe I can draw you myself!" said Leonardus.

He was in earnest, and I jumped out. So did Mrs. Huberjide and Maggie and Esther, and Mrs. Huberjide and Maggie volunteered to push the wagon from behind. We did not get on very fast, and the rain set in; but the great, awkward wagon-cover shielded Mrs. Chafferlee, and I did not mind for the rest. Esther wondered why nobody had thought to bring an umbrella! She was sure that every thing she had on would be spoiled. Leonardus told her he thought there would be time for her to run back and

get one, while we were travelling to the next station. He was bound to be cheerful, and his spirit was contagious. I laughed quite like myself, when panting and perspiring he halted and called out:

"Five minutes for refreshments!"

Esther did not see how grown-up women could go giggling along the road, after having had such a dreadful escape. Bright asked what made laughing wicked? Esther replied by muttering, "It is well enough for those who hain't got no feelings."

"I've got feelings," said Bright; "I feel as if I should like to give my dog a bone."

Mrs. Huberjide proposed to change places with Leonardus, and let him push while she pulled. I took hold with her, and we had quité a lively run down a slight descent. Esther was left in the lurch, and Leonardus made us wait for her to catch up. When she came alongside he asked her to ride, and Mrs. Huberjide and I laughed again.

We were not alone on that lone road. Wagons and stragglers passed us, but they took no notice of our primitive mode of moving. Once, while we were resting, Leonardus asked me what I had saved in my bundle. Was it any thing which I could make available to throw around me to keep off the rain? I had long since put my Astrakhan cloak on Mrs. Chafferlee.

I had forgotten, so we opened it. One dozen night-dresses, which had just been sent home from the seamstress, starched and ruffled and fluted, and that was all! Leonardus looked down at me with a very comical expression on his face.



"Speak it out; I know what you think," I said.

"Ah, wifey, let the wise vaunt their wisdom. We are spared to each other," and the exquisite joy conferred on me by that little speech tingled to my fingers' ends.

A story-and-a-half house greeted at last our wearied vision. We all put our shoulders to the wheel, or, more strictly speaking, our hands to the wagon, except Esther, who declared that her father's daughter never should be made a pack-horse of. We were admitted, and Mrs. Chafferlee was tenderly cared for on a soft feather bed. We all dropped exhausted around her, on chairs, on the floor, anywhere. The good farmer's wife kindled her kitchen-fire, to prepare us something to eat. Leonardus brought the sticks that built the fire. What powers of endurance! He came to me after a few minutes:

"Now, wifey, you must not borrow any trouble about me. You are safe for the present, and I am going to the city to look after others who are not so well provided for."

I sprang up in alarm.

"What, when you have not had a mouthful of food for thirty-six hours!"

"I am not so forgetful of myself as that. I have been in the pantry, and blundered upon about a yard of cold roast beef. I set myself at work, and, by diligently nibbling I got outside the whole of it. Don't stare so!—I asked permission. The farmer is saddling his best horse, and is going to dress me up in his hat and coat. So, good-by! Sleep and eat, and get freshened up as much as possible before I get back."

Since I could do nothing less than follow his directions, I will permit my readers to follow him.

It was daylight when he first came upon the abomination of desolation. Six miles of ruin! Longitudinally seven or eight! Cellars were filled with smouldering and unsightly heaps of rubbish. The streets were encumbered with *débris*, the sidewalks had tumbled into the vaults, the telegraph-wires, curled and whitened, lay everywhere, and the street-car rails were bent into the most eccentric shapes by the heat. In many instances they stood up out of the car-staples without any fire having touched them, the effects of the intensely heated air. In one place he got off his horse to examine a car-wheel, which was completely welded into the rail. The beautiful dwellings, all through the length and breadth of North Chicago, were laid low, save one, which, standing in the centre of its own grounds, covering a whole block, was left. Ha! what is that he sees in that wild waste! The great greenhouse of the McCaggs, without a pane of glass broken! Their beautiful home gone, the trees stripped of bark and branches, and the flowers untouched! He rode nearer. The heat had brought out the blossoms, and it was like one great, rich, full bouquet! What a sight amid such surroundings! He rode on. The bridges were gone, the elevators were gone, the churches were gone, the newspaper-offices were gone, the banks were gone, the hotels were gone, the great wholesale and retail stores were gone, the school-buildings were gone, the custom-house was gone, the post-office was gone, the city hall was gone, the gas-works were gone,

the water-works were gone, and the railroad-stations were gone. The whole of the great Central Depot might have been carried away in a hand-basket.

As the growth of Chicago was the superlative of all modern history, so, alas! its destruction. The story of it has gone to the ends of the earth, and has called forth everywhere tearful sympathy and generous aid. Thank God for the chords which connect the members of our common humanity! The Gospel doctrine of charity lives in the hearts of all men. While Leonardus, on that sad morning, saw how brick and marble walls had crumbled like sand before the fell destroyer, the importance of our new agents of civilization were being realized by millions of human beings. The railroads, the telegraph, and the deep-sea cables, were mediums by which Christian nations proved that they were indeed Christian to the core. In distant cities, in foreign lands, the tocsin had been rung, and from one common heart gushed bounteous supplies. Laden trains were already flying to the relief of the houseless and starving.

Leonardus, after much difficulty, reached the west side, and found Mrs. Hortense. She was comfortable, but in great distress of mind concerning her daughter. He promised to let her know as soon as he could obtain any information. He galloped on, intending by a long *détour* to reach the unburned portion of the south side, and learn if possible of the fate of Spicy and Mrs. Vance. Somewhere near Twelfth-Street bridge he stopped to hear the story of the vicious cow that had kicked over the kerosene-lamp that had burned up two

hundred millions of dollars, when some one called his name, and, turning his head, he saw Spicy's carriage being reined up to where he was sitting on his horse, with Dr. Gildersleeve in it. They exchanged questions and answers with great rapidity, and started north at a brisk rate, Leonardus keeping as near the carriage-window as his raw-boned old ambler would permit. Dr. Gildersleeve was distressed the moment he learned that Helen had not reached our house, and Leonardus trembled for Mrs. Vance. Spicy was at her friend's cottage with her children, in bed, and tenderly cared for.

They turned aside when north of Lake Street for Leonardus to point out the house where he had left Mrs. Hortense, but they would not take time to stop now. There was a carriage in front of it, however, at which Leonardus looked the second time. An idea struck him, for he asked Dr. Gildersleeve to wait while he rode that way. Yes, it was Richard on the box, holding Mrs. Vance's singed horses. He had stayed on the west side with a friend, but was out early to see whom he could find. Mrs. Hortense was the only person of whom he knew the whereabouts; he had obtained that information from Leonardus among the terrors of yesterday. He thought by applying to her he should get the clew to others. She told him that General Belmore had been there, and was coming again. He waited, and was rewarded.

Leonardus ordered him to follow them, as they were on the search for Mrs. Vance, and the man was only too glad to obey, for he loved his mistress.

The extreme northern limit of the city reached, and they moved slowly and peered anxiously among the groups of dejected-looking people by the waysides. It was enough to wring one's heart to see them in their misery, to say nothing of the heart-rending and harrowing tales of distress to which they could not stop to listen. Lincoln Park, indeed! How hope to find the lost in that incongruous assemblage?

Leaving the carriages and the farmer's horse in charge of the drivers, Leonardus and Dr. Gildersleeve set out on their pilgrimage. They went across, they went up and down, they wound around among the paths and shrubbery, their eyes ever active—ever on the alert.

"Mrs. Vance may have obtained a vehicle and been transported far into the country," said Leonardus.

Just then Cousin Phil nearly ran over him.

"Ay! ay! Belmore, have you seen my mother?"

"No. Have you lost her?"

"I fear so. Our house was burned while I was trying to get a few packages of money out of the bank. I have no idea where to look for her."

"I will take one side of the park and you the other, and we shall thereby compass more territory in the same space of time," said Dr. Gildersleeve, leaving them.

Leonardus and Phil had scarcely proceeded half a hundred yards when they came upon the two pale women, watching by the sleeping dead. Helen Gildersleeve, on the straightened cushions of the easy-chair, was neatly wrapped in

the water-proof, awaiting her last journey. Mrs. Vance was sitting on the ground, and Miss Terrapin's head was lying in her lap. Dr. Greer, who had been revolving all the morning in a circle, without finding any way to relieve the ladies, appeared, and told Leonardus what Mrs. Vance had undergone, and, since her carriage was so near, they both thought it best for her to go immediately to it, Phil offering to remain with Miss Terrapin until Leonardus should overtake Dr. Gildersleeve.

Mrs. Vance was far more exhausted than she had even dreamed, and it was with great difficulty that, leaning on Dr. Greer's arm, she accomplished the distance. He noticed that her shoes were burned almost entirely off her feet, and that her eyelashes were gone. She begged Dr. Greer to go directly back to Miss Terrapin, and, once more buried among the cushions of her own luxurious carriage, gave way to a burst of grief. Richard got down from his seat, came round to the window, and said:

"Don't take on so! Mrs. Chafferlee was carried as safe as a brick. I don't think your block was much burned. I ruther guess the girls got the things out of the house, for they are deused smart workers."

"Thank you, Richard. You are very kind," she replied, and he wiped the dampness from his eyes, and was glad he had made his crude attempt at consolation.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE SLEEPING DEAD.

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour passed. Then was seen approaching, slowly, Leonardus and Phil, bearing all that remained of Helen Gildersleeve. Beside them walked her husband, looking ten years older than when he entered the Park, and, following, Dr. Greer assisted Miss Terrapin, who, like Mrs. Vance, could hardly support her own weight. He helped her into the carriage with Mrs. Vance, who, at the first moment possible, held an earnest conversation with Leonardus; then the door of her carriage was closed, and she was on her way to her aunt Mary, at our place of refuge on the prairie.

Dr. Greer and Dr. Gildersleeve were both amazed at the abruptness of her departure. They both wished to speak to her. Dr. Greer had indefinitely formed projects in his mind. Perhaps he might be able to serve her. He had words for her ears, at all events. Dr. Gildersleeve was profoundly grateful to one who had shown such rare self-abnegation in ministering to his unfortunate wife; for Dr. Greer and Miss Terrapin had both borne testimony, during the few minutes he had been with them. He was wondering if the English language could furnish him any form of speech with which to thank her as he wished, when, lo! she was gone, and he had not even seen her face.

His quick mind had settled the question in regard to Helen's remains. They must be taken East and deposited in the old family vault, where her fathers slept. The difficulties in the way, and they

were many, must be overcome by persistent, energetic effort. West Chicago was intact, except the portions near the river, and they could doubtless find some church where she could be received and prepared for removal. They made the attempt, and, not until the dead rested in a simple pine coffin, did Leonardus turn his face ruinward.

The world may well wonder, for where was there ever such undaunted pluck and enterprise manifested as among the business-men of Chicago? With their great commercial structures still crumbling and smoking about them, with their wealth still buried in vaults beneath the ruins, with no assurance as to what measure of indemnity they could expect from the insurance companies for their terrible losses, they were already at work devising ways and means to rebuild the city, and reestablish its commercial supremacy in the West. Leonardus spent the remainder of the day among those cool-headed men, who had already organized relief-committees in every division of the city to provide food and shelter for the destitute, and, not until long after the shades of evening had fallen, did he return to us. He slept on the kitchen-floor, with a buffalo-robe wound about him, and was off again in the morning before the sun was up. There was no repining at losses; although few had lost more heavily than we, no manifestations of discouragement, no faint-heartedness, on his part.

"If Mrs. Vance's carriage is available, try to meet us at the church at one o'clock this afternoon, as there will be brief funeral exercises," were his parting words to me, through the cat-hole

of the door, for five of us occupied improvised beds in one apartment.

He seemed to have room in his heart for every thing, nor was I jealous of my apparently infinitesimal place at such a time.

Fred Gildersleeve arrived from New York that same morning. His brother met him at the train, and prepared his mind for what was to follow. He had passed through a fearful season of excitement and cankering anxiety on his journey. All sorts of rumors had reached him. The telegrams received in New York before he left excited the greatest consternation in view of the probable financial results. The panic at the Stock Exchange was scarcely surpassed by that of the Black Friday, so fresh in the memory of America's sons. One word alone—Chicago—seemed to be the beginning of every sentence uttered in the great metropolis. It was shouted by the newsboys, buzzed by the dealers in stocks, whispered by bankers and startled insurance-agents, discussed aloud by friends and strangers, by people walking and by people riding, by people selling and by people buying, by rich and by poor, by old and by young. Fred Gildersleeve would have moved heaven and earth to reach his wife, had it been possible. But he must wait till the train went. He knew his house was burned long before that huge engine spit and sputtered and puffed and jerked the cars out of New York. He had the utmost confidence in Spicy's heroism and strength of character, but what could a woman do, tied down with three little children? He learned what a woman could do and had done!

I complied with Leonardus's wishes, but neither Mrs. Vance nor Miss Terrapin was able to leave her bed. Mrs. Huberjide and Bright accompanied me, for I had promised the former to drive about among the refugees and try to find her husband.

Dr. Gildersleeve, and his brother, Mrs. Hortense, Dr. Greer, and Leonardus, were already at the church when we arrived. The pastor and two or three strangers were also present. The exercises commenced immediately, and were beautifully appropriate. A few flowers had been scattered on the coffin, and we all took a final farewell glance at the marble face, upon which there was no trace of pain or suffering now—but peace, sweet peace.

I had just time to take Mrs. Hortense's hand and express my ardent sympathy in her affliction, when Leonardus hurried me to the carriage, whispering:

"We are already in danger of missing the train—having waited for you to get here."

Why was I always behind time in every thing? I sat looking after them until they were out of sight, and then turned my attention to Mrs. Huberjide. She knew one family on the west side; she thought it not only possible, but probable, that Mr. Huberjide would report himself there. She told me the number as near as she could remember, and I hunted it up. She was right in her conjectures. Mr. Huberjide was there. He had arrived about an hour before ourselves. He was surprised to meet his wife thus. I don't know what he thought had become of her. He had

run for the lake when he saw the frightful sight of flames striking buildings and going directly through them, often sending their bristling tongues rods into the rear and into some other building at the same moment! What chance was there for a man when the very bricks were consumed instantaneously? He buried himself in sand and water until he was taken off by a tug. He had been forty-eight hours without food, and was finishing a rather long-drawn-out meal of cold meat and bread-and-butter while he talked with us. He declared upon his word as a gentleman of honor that he had never seen such a fire in his life. I believed him. I left Mrs. Huberjide to compare notes and see if they could settle the question between them, which had encountered the most danger.

When I told Leonardus about the interview, he laughed.

"He was a New-York man, you say? That accounts for it all. He can't stand fire. If he and his wife rode in a coal-cart from the Tremont to Indiana Street, I should have supposed they would have hung together to the end of the route. But he probably thought that wives were a commodity which could be got any day—if he should by any chance get burned himself, there would be no more marrying or giving in marriage."

I shook my head reprovingly. I was like Esther, averse to levity on grave subjects. I was glad they had found each other, and I hoped that New York would send them another wedding-outfit.

Before he slept Wednesday night, Fred Gildersleeve had rented a furnished cottage on the lower part of Michigan Avenue, and, on Thursday, moved his

family, with the few things Spicy had saved, into it. The next morning their carriage came for us. I was sorry to leave Mrs. Vance behind, but there was no alternative, for it did not seem prudent to try to move Mrs. Chafferlee. Miss Terrapin was quite sick, also, and Mrs. Vance insisted upon keeping and taking care of her.

"If I have enough money left to insure me a pint of oatmeal per day, I shall settle a pension on Miss Terrapin, for her faithfulness to me on Monday," she said.

But how was it likely to be about her pint of oatmeal per day? That was the question. Dr. Greer had been to the farmer's house to discuss it with her, and had gone away sadder than he came. Leonardus said the land was left, if the blocks of stores and dwellings were gone. She would probably recover something from the Eastern insurance companies. Not one in Chicago would ever pay five cents on a dollar. How was she situated at present? She had not a solitary penny. Her purse, which was in her pocket when she left her house, was not there at a later date. Whether it had been lost or stolen, it was all the same—gone. Leonardus hadn't any money. He had paid his last dollar to a boy for running with a message for him during the second hour of the fire. I hadn't any, not even a pocket-book. I left that under my pillow, where I usually put it at night.

But Spicy always had money, and I promised to send some to Mrs. Vance for present necessities, as soon as we got to the south side.

What was my consternation on find-

ing Spicy without a dollar! She had paid all she had to workmen and others during the fire. And, what was more embarrassing still, Fred had returned from New York with less than twenty-five dollars in his pocket, and that had all been spent in getting his family safely housed.

"We are a pretty set!" said Leonardus, walking up and down.

"Haven't you any credit?" asked Fred.

"I did have, but it is in dust and ashes now. I dare say I shall have again, but I should like a quarter or ten cents to carry in my pocket meanwhile. It makes a man feel more like a man, you know."

"How would it do to set up a curiosity-stand and charge five cents a look?" said Fred, producing some half-melted sleeve-buttons which he had picked up, and which were in themselves mournful evidences of the nation's calamity.

"That reminds me," said Leonardus, "of a stick of petrified wood which was shown me yesterday. It had been exhumed from under a drug-store where it is supposed to have been converted into stone by some new and hitherto undiscovered process connected with the fire. It really had the density and weight of stone. Some thought it maple by the grain, others declared it pine, judging from the pitch-deposits which seemed to be in it. It was cut up and distributed among quite a number of gentlemen, and a piece is to be submitted to Prof. Pagan, of St. Louis, who, if you remember, lost his position as State geologist, by refusing to acknowledge that tin grew in Missouri."

"I saw something still more remarkable to-day," said Fred. "I saw the Hon. Clemence Fortescue, State Senator of Nebraska, carrying in a ton of coal by hand. He came to Chicago as fast as steam could bring him, as soon as he heard of the fire, for he had a brother here who had lost his place of business. They knocked round, and put up a little shanty with such material as they could get hold of, and, as he was aching for something more to do, he lent a ready ear and a helping hod to a poor woman who was bewailing the fate of a heap of unprotected coal which had been dumped in front of her door. I inquired if she was husbandless and a widow. He said not. It was an instance of pure good-nature. Charity had nothing to do with it, for the woman had not been touched by the fire, she only was afraid her fuel would be stolen. Her husband was on a neighboring corner, talking loudly, and calling our city officials idiots for letting every thing go to the mischief."

Leonardus's lip curled under his moustache, but he continued his promenade. At one end of the library was a small conservatory filled with choice plants and flowers, and, conspicuous there, a tube-rose, much too weighty for its feeble stalk, was trying to open its petals. He paused before the glass door and regarded it intently, then turned abruptly toward Fred.

"How did you happen to find this gem of a cottage all fitted up as it were to order? It never occurred to me to inquire before."

Fred smiled. There was something very peculiar about Fred's smile. "Ah, general, thereby hangs a tale. It was

the third house I rented on that memorable Wednesday which seems a month ago, judging from events since, after we parted with Brother Grandison at the cars. The first belonged to my old partner Stevens. I met him just after you left me at the corner of Wabash Avenue and Eighteenth Street, and, as he did not seem to be going anywhere in particular, I offered to take him there. He was in a state of great nervous excitement, had lost heavily, had been without sleep for three days and nights, and was nearly famished for want of food. He talked about sending his family to friends in Pittsburg, and I proposed to rent his house off his hands. The idea struck him favorably, we discussed all the *pros* and *cons*, and closed the bargain, except signing the lease, which was to be accomplished in the course of the day. I stopped to see Spicy, and was to join him at the house, which I wished to examine, in half an hour. When I arrived, according to appointment, I found his practical wife just closing an arrangement with another gentleman. Stevens undertook an explanation, but I did not wait to hear it. I hurried to the next block, where I could see a sign swinging. Found a decent three-story brick, the paste on the notice 'TO LET,' not yet dry. The proprietor rented it to me for one hundred dollars per month, and I left, to see about raising the requisite amount of money to advance before putting our names to papers. The man knew me, hence I had no fears of his breaking his word. I stopped to see Spicy again, for you must know that I had as yet exchanged but a few words with her. The doctor, who seemed wretchedly anxious as to the re-

sults of her extreme prostration, stood guard at her door, and forbade our talking over five minutes at a time, and prohibited a word of reference to the late terrible scenes which she had passed through. I took my carriage, which had just been put in the barn, for a drive out to Danforth's on the west side, knowing that he always kept money at his house, and never doubting but that he would cash a draft for me on New York. I was hindered for a few minutes talking with some gentlemen at Twelfth-Street bridge, and a little beyond I met Charles Hinchman. He was on horseback, riding furiously, but reined up to shake hands with me through the carriage-window—said his family were yet in the open air somewhere on the north side, but that he had hired a house, and was going for them, hoping to get them under cover before nightfall. I congratulated him upon having found such a rare commodity as a house, and told him how I had been similarly blessed. He inquired where mine was located, and I told him No. — Wabash Avenue.

" 'What! in the Wilmarth block?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Impossible! I have just rented that house myself.'

" 'I engaged to pay one hundred dollars per month for it not more than an hour ago!'

" 'And I signed a lease agreeing to give two hundred dollars per month not twenty minutes since!'

" 'There was no longer any question about who had the best right to the establishment. The afternoon was waning, and we did not waste many more minutes together. I drove up and down and



over and across; I inquired everywhere and of everybody. I was told it was of no use. Others had scoured every inch of the standing part of the city, and there was not a house of any sort to be had. I was about to give up the search for that day, when my eye lighted upon a bit of paper pinned upon the door of this cottage. In an instant I was upon the steps, and five gentlemen followed me. In answer to my violent ring a lady opened the door, evidently much agitated. I asked the rent of the house.

“‘One hundred and twenty-five dollars per month,’ she said, in a feverish tone.

“‘I will take it, you may tell these gentlemen the house is rented,’ I replied, quickly, and walked in while saying so, although the lady stepped aside to let me pass her with apparent reluctance.

“‘My son has already gone out to inquire after the responsibility of four or five applicants, and I cannot give you an answer now,’ she said, turning slightly pale.

“‘But I will take the house, and I must have my answer now,’ I replied, authoritatively, and, dropping into a chair by the centre-table, I commenced writing with my pocket-pencil upon a scrap of paper which lay there.

“‘What are you doing?’ she asked, with a distressed look.

“‘Drawing up a contract for you to sign.’

“‘Indeed, sir, I cannot sign any contract now, nor give you the refusal of the house even, until my son returns. Please don’t try to take advantage of an unprotected lady.’

“‘Have no fears on that score, mad-

am; on the contrary, I will endeavor to protect you. And, as those gentlemen upon the steps are rather clamorous for admittance, you had better tell them the house is rented, for I shall take it.’

“She looked at me with incredulous wonder! Her situation must have been a painful one. She had been induced to put her house in the market in order to fly to some safer abode, but had never dreamed that overwhelming numbers would wrangle with each other in order to secure it!—There was a scuffle on the veranda, and one man knocked another down. She ran to the window, then came back, trembling.

“‘But, sir, I do not even know your name!’

“‘Fred Gildersleeve.’

“She started, and her countenance changed.

“‘Are you he who married Spicy Merriman?’

“‘The same. Do you know her?’

“A broad belt of light crossed her face, and, stepping quickly to the door, she announced to the impatient outsiders that the house was rented. Then she explained. Her daughter was one of Miss Gilbert’s pupils, and had known Spicy at school, etc.

“I finished my contract, which was to the effect that, in consideration of ten dollars, by me paid, Mrs. Sontag was to rent me her house, at eight o’clock the same evening. She remarked:

“‘I should like the privilege of reserving my silver and linen.’

“It was the first intimation I had that I was renting a *furnished* house! I had been so eager to obtain the mere shell of a building, that I had thought of

nothing beyond. I quietly put back my pencil and inserted the word *furnished*, while I graciously permitted the owner to reserve the customary articles! To make a sure thing doubly sure, after she had signed the paper, I took out my three-hundred dollar watch, and insisted upon her retaining it until my return. She was loth to do so; said she did not wish to incur such a responsibility, it might be stolen, or the remainder of the city might burn; but I made her keep it. I then drove over to Danforth's, and, to my surprise, he refused to cash my paper! Said the whole country would go to smash, New York banks and all. Said he hadn't a dollar, but he knew I knew that he was lying. It was eight o'clock by the time I got back to Mrs. Sontag's, and I found her with trunks packed and anxious to leave for the East on the ten-o'clock evening train. She seemed to think what was left of the city would certainly burn before she could get out of its limits. As she was going to New York, I offered her a sight-draft, which she accepted; the whole business was closed—she went out, and we came in."

"There is something strikingly familiar in the fashion of these rooms," said Leonardus. He had twice walked to the parlor-door, as if on a tour of observation, while Fred had been telling his story.

An idea ran like a knife through my brain just at that instant! We were in the old Dwight mansion, which had been moved down-town, backed upon a corner lot, and remodelled and fitted up until it was not so much to be wondered at that we did not recognize it readily.

Spicy, propped up with cushions on the sofa, laughed quite like herself when I pointed out the old familiar niches in the walls. But her face saddened again instantly, for the associations of the ghost-closet, the recent revelation, and the sad termination of the life of poor Helen Gildersleeve, were too painfully fresh in her mind. And I thought of Nursy Brown, and what she must have suffered during the time she lived with me as a servant, for the very shape of the windows and doors, notwithstanding their new dress, carried me back to those other and long-ago days. Fred interrupted my reverie, for we had all been eloquently silent for a time.

"But about this money-matter, general; if you won't undertake to make any by honest labor, we shall be relieved as soon as Grandison gets back, next week, for he is so fortunate as to have his laid away at the East, and will be prepared to help the rest of us until we can stand on our own feet."

"Water seems of more account than money just now," said Spicy. "There is none nearer than the lake, and we shall need some dinner by-and-by."

"That is only a few blocks away! John must bring some instead of driving us to the ruins. We will take the cars."

"The cars, indeed! who will pay for us? I think we will take to our feet," said Leonardus, laughing.

"And how about the dinner?" asked Spicy. "If there are no butcher-shops and groceries, and no supplies in the city, and no money—"

Fred laid his hand across her mouth. "Do you remember the mock-trial on board the steamboat last summer, when

the culprit was sentenced to be hanged, after that imprisoned for life, and, upon his release, doomed to join the temperance-society?"

"I am not able to make the application," interrupted Leonardus.

"I suppose not, since it does not reach your case. But it is hardly worth while for us to sit and look at each other like a party of children who have lost all their marbles—particularly when it is a matter of something to eat. I am getting up an appetite myself. Come, general, let us go on a foraging expedition."

"I don't see what you *can* do!" said Spicy.

"Trust two good-looking men to scare up something. Was it not I who invented a potato-candlestick last night? Have you no blind faith? I don't think I shall apply to the relief-committee, of which General Belmore here happens to be one, unless it is for a cigar. I'm dying for a smoke," and Fred kissed Spicy, and the two strode away.

Saturday morning I went over to see Mrs. Vance, and recited the various straits to which we had all been subjected by the want of a few dollars in change. Who ever knew before that one had so many ways for money? It was just as impossible to borrow as it was to lend! Where one was as well off as we, ten thousand were worse off. Money! such a thing was not in circulation!

Mrs. Vance smiled.

"It is something of a shock to drop from an income of one hundred thousand dollars a year to nothing," she said.

"Yes, and to be cut off from every

souvenir of the past, as I am. Not a fragment of any thing exists that was once mine. Not even a pocket-handkerchief, nor a precious gift, nor jewel, nor pen-stroke—all my idols are gone."

I was weak enough to break down there, for what I had had, and I fear too lightly appreciated, came rushing into my mind, and Mrs. Vance sprang and threw her arms around me and kissed, me without speaking. Was she weeping, also?

I recovered myself presently, for I thought of Leonardus, and how much harder the blow had fallen upon him than me, and I went to the window and commented upon the fine-looking chickens which were stalking up and down the yard, and asked Mrs. Vance how her horses liked boarding on hay.

She said Richard was in the greatest distress for want of a curry-comb and brush.

After a while I got back to the original object of my visit, to tell her how the dreadful money-pinch would be over as soon as Dr. Gildersleeve returned, for he was expected to bring a small bank in his trunk.

Oh, how quickly the spirit took alarm!

"You need not be weighed down with care for me, my dear Mrs. Belmore. Aunt Mary is now able to go to Detroit, and I shall leave on Monday. The railroad is issuing free tickets—hush (as I attempted to interrupt her)! what matters it if I do accept the provisions of a grand and spontaneous charity? I would not even hesitate to dwell under one of those twelve thousand tents which have been sent to shelter the houseless. But

it is not necessary. I have distant relatives in Detroit, or rather Aunt Mary has, and they will give us cordial welcome. Herbert, her son, is in a position to help her, and for the rest I must trust in God. The good farmer here declines to accept any compensation for his services, as he did in your case; but he will be the first one I shall remember if ever my turn comes."

I tried to combat her purpose. Fred and Spicy had a room designated for her in their house. But she was firm. As for Miss Terrapin, I took her home with me. How she mourned over the loss of her wig! Her few scattering hairs, which had not been white before the fire, were white now, and she felt the October cold about her head keenly.

"Are all the hair-dressing establishments burned?" was her pathetic inquiry when I commenced making her toilet, preparatory to the drive, with a coarse horn-comb, belonging to the farmer's wife.

Yes. But I bade her never mind. We should be quite exclusive and by ourselves. Nobody need see her. She appeared resigned. But, when I had completed the task, she asked for a looking-glass.

"Singular that my hair should turn as it has! But it always run in our family to get gray young."

Esther, quite indignant that we were not forthcoming in the pay for her baggage, which had been destroyed, left us on Wednesday morning, and went to look for another place. I had taken Maggie with me to my sister's house, and the indefatigable Richard had stumbled about until he had found Mrs.

Vance's servants, and they were with her assisting in the care of Mrs. Chafferee, until she could make some provision for them.

I intended to meet Mrs. Vance on Monday, but one of Spicy's horses was sick, and I could not get to her. A note from her on Tuesday told of her safe arrival in Detroit, and the kindness of her friends.

Dr. Gildersleeve arrived on Wednesday evening, having left Mrs. Hortense with her relatives. He brought a rift of sunshine with him, in the shape of a warm heart and plenty of greenbacks. He was more fortunate than any of us, for, save in his paper, which was bound to live and thrive, in spite of its scorching, he had invested very little in Chicago. He was ready to do so now. I heard him saying to Leonardus:

"She has all the elements of a great city left, except the mere buildings. Look at her river-harbor, which has been dredged and enlarged, at enormous expense! And her piers and breakwaters. See her light-houses, for the security of navigation! See her tunnel under Lake Michigan, competent to supply a city of thrice her recent magnitude with pure water! Then there is her expensive system of sewerage, which, being underground, and of incombustible material, of course has not been consumed! And all the grading of her streets and the excavation of her cellars and vaults! And her vast cattle-yards and pork-packing establishments! The loss of her railroad-depots, however severely felt, will not obstruct travel and traffic, for passengers can be received and landed, and freight delivered, in the open air!

And, what is more, Chicago has not lost her shrewd, enterprising, energetic, indomitable men of business. The brilliant, powerful city of a week ago has still its financial, commercial, social, and domestic roots stretched to the remote quarters of the earth; its marked quotations and opinions in all American cities; its prices of grains, hides, and lumber, in Europe; its trade connections reaching through San Francisco to China and Japan, and its personal family ties everywhere. Her sorrow is a common sorrow. Her uprising from her ashes will be a common joy."

His earnestness and well-timed and efficient aid stimulated and inspired many a desponding heart. Leonardus said men's faces brightened when he appeared among them. His own was grave, but there was a well of tenderness hidden behind its outward seeming. He had encouraging words for all, and something in his purse for many more than the world would ever discover.

He was ceaseless in his inquiries for Mrs. Vance. He wanted to render her some substantial token of his appreciation of her unspeakable kindness to his wife. He charged me with many and various messages, which I never delivered. He knew that she had been robbed of all her possessions; he had heard us make many and frequent allusions to it, and wondered why Spicy and myself were so opposed to his sending her a check. I told him that she was too high-toned a woman to accept a favor, even though it might come in the spirit of gratitude on his part, and be entirely her due. Then he tried to force it upon one or the other of us to send as

we saw fit, and was grieved that we should decline.

We remained with Spicy while Leonardus laid the foundations of new fortunes and hopes. He had lost so heavily that we tried not to think or talk of it between ourselves. Every word was like blistering a bleeding wound.

Fred Gildersleeve, thanks to his wife, had only received a set back of a few months. Choice possessions had been burned which no money could ever replace, but from the great bulk of his solid property he had only to count out about one year's income.

I heard from Mrs. Vance often. Leonardus tried to do something for her when he was in New York and Boston, but insurance-money came slowly. Her letters were cheerful—far more so than mine—although I was sure that she must have many and pressing needs to which she made no allusion.

The new year had dawned upon us, and Russia's royal scion, the Grand-duke Alexis, had been entertained with the most magnificent ruins of the age. It was all Chicago had to offer, save warm and cordial greetings, and profoundest respect for the powerful and onlightened nation which he represented. He was her guest, and his princely presence infused new life into her working heroes, although the city could not indulge in an ostentatious and formal reception. She could only extend the right hand of fellowship and lie in very ruins at his feet.

Leonardus returned from Milwaukee the day after the grand banquet at the Plankinton House. We were all anxious to learn particulars. He described the

order in which the guests were seated at the table.

"The grand-duke was the centre of attraction. He was dressed in orthodox clothes, and, except that he was the handsomest man present, could not have been distinguished from the other guests. He seems to be rather of an investigating and practical turn of mind, and cares, I think, more for a clear insight into our customs, resources, and manufacturing interests, than for state dinners."

"And what of the speeches?" asked Fred.

"Excellent. What the grand-duke said was pithy and to the point. Admiral Polin responded to the toast, 'The Russian Navy.' But the happiest speech of the evening was from Count Boris. I can recall only a part of it, but, speaking of his present trip through the West, he said that he realized more than ever before that 'westward the star of empire takes its way,' was no legend, but a fixed fact. But, in Russia, eastward the star of empire works its way, and he hoped the time would soon come when the relations of Russia and America would become so intimate that a ferry-boat should ply Behring Straits."

"Who is Count Boris?" inquired Spicy.

"The leading Russian in America at the present time, with the exception of Prince Alexis himself," replied Leonardus. "But I must hasten to tell you of an Eastern capitalist whom I run upon as I was crossing over from the Milwaukee cars. He is feeling round for a place to pile up a few loose dollars, and I called his attention to the site of Mrs. Vance's Lake-Street block. I am to see him in

the morning, and I should not be surprised if she got a bid."

I hoped so most sincerely. It was several weeks afterward, however, before my hopes were realized, for he was one of those cautious men who look long before investing. But he at last made a direct offer for its purchase. Leonardus telegraphed to Mrs. Vance to come to Chicago in the next train, and I went to the cars to receive her.

Dr. Gildersleeve was staying with us, and was cognizant of all the facts, except that he only knew of Mrs. Vance as Mrs. Vance.

It was just before dinner when she arrived. Cheerful grate-fires were burning in parlor, library, and dining-room. Spicy had arranged about the apartments a half-dozen or more pretty bouquets from her private conservatory, and the perfume of unseen heliotrope was everywhere faint and sweet. Leonardus had been with me to the train, and Fred and Spicy were rarely more cordial than when welcoming their present guest.

In spite of the fatigue of a cold day's journey, I never saw a woman so well worth looking at. Her head, poised like that of a queen, and her stylish travelling-suit of soft drab merino, with hat to match, suiting her so wonderfully. Her costume simple enough, and, as I afterward learned, the work of her own hands, but so artistic in its finish that I could only think of Raphael's draperies. The absence of life-giving colors, so trying to most people, was singularly effective in bringing out the full brilliancy of her complexion, and in giving life and expression to her classic features. Her beauty was of a kind to grow upon one,

like some incomprehensible masterpiece of art. She was glad to see us, and her face was lighted with the genial warmth of her nature; but, did I fancy that her sweet graciousness, which had so won my heart in the days gone by, had given place to a certain *hauteur* of manner? It did not occur to me that I had noticed the same thing, and thought the same thoughts, every time I had met her for years! She was a study, and I went on studying her, while I laid her wraps one after another upon the sofa, and wheeled a large easy-chair toward the fire for her to occupy.

At that moment Dr. Gildersleeve, who had been engrossed with a book in the library during our somewhat noisy greetings, entered the parlor, and I introduced him directly to Mrs. Vance; but, with all our conjectures and divinations, we were totally unprepared for what followed.

Mrs. Vance flushed violently, even her lips turned scarlet, as her eyes met those of Dr. Gildersleeve. He had advanced with extended hand, but he suddenly stood still, his arm dropping powerless by his side, and his face whitening until it was ashy pale. He had recognized her, and I felt, as it were, through the air, the shock by which the whole truth flooded his mind. Who may ever know what words were scorching his tongue, and crying, like souls in pain, to be uttered? Tears—youth's long-lost familiars—glittered in his speaking eyes, as they rested upon her with a sort of reverential awe; and yet, the concentrated passion of months and of years flashed in their heart-searching gaze. What did he read in the depths of her blue orbs?

Why stood they there in silence, as if regarding each other from the lonely length of each life? Are there loves in this world for which time can renew all that time may destroy? Are there lives that cling to one faith and die with it? His voice came at last, husky, yet thrilling:

"Ida!"

The response was soft, and sweet as a tune that one knows.

"Grandison!"

I did not see, but by some mysterious intuition I was conscious, that he had snatched her to his heart. I did not hear, but a low, short, sharp, stifled, agonized sob from her lips was telegraphed to my senses. I was in the dining-room endeavoring to suppress a fit of hysterics, to which I was not at all subject. Spicy was there before me, busy moving each plate and individual butter about an inch farther toward the head of the table, and then, having separated them too far from their napkins, moved them all back again. Something sparkled on her cheek like a diamond, but I supposed it couldn't be one, since it is not the customary place to wear diamonds. Rather unexpectedly she wound her arms round my neck.

"What a secret that has been for us to keep!" she said.

Raising my eyes after a while, when the shower had passed by, I saw Fred leaning against the library mantel in his usual attitude of ease and self-possession. One hand toyed negligently with the flowers in a vase, and, as the leaves scattered, he carefully brushed them back from the edge of the marble, that they might not fall upon the carpet. He was

never handsomer, nor his tone steadier, than when, with a perplexed frown, he summoned Spicy to his side to ask for a solution of what now for the first time, since hearing her remark, struck him as an inexplicable problem. I did not hear their conversation, but the secret which Spicy had kept so long was a secret no longer, as far as he was concerned.

Bright was the most considerate member of the family, for, in quietly leaving the parlor, after seeing the rest of us do so, he shut the door behind him.

"Mamma!" said he, softly, looking very much disturbed, "I saw Dr. Gildersleeve kiss Mrs. Vance, and she never tried to go away, nor any thing! But I suppose it is their own affair, and you must not tell it to any one."

Leonardus came down from the nursery presently, where he had been romping "with Spicy's little soldiers," he said. I am sure I don't know when he went up there! He took me to task for leaving my guest so rudely.

"Mrs. Vance is a woman of genius, and will credit you with plotting against her peace."

"She may be a woman of genius, but she is essentially human," I responded.

But the dinner was spoiling, and the cook showed symptoms of impatience by sending two or three times to know if we were ready to have it put upon the table. Spicy said I must go back to the parlor and do the honors, while she went up-stairs to her children for a few moments. Fred and Leonardus were both of the opinion that it was a duty which devolved upon me. Bright said:

"Mamma, hadn't you better rattle the door a little before you go in?"

I only coughed. The occupants of the parlor did not seem to notice my consumptive tendencies. They were standing where we left them, Dr. Gildersleeve's arms encircling Mrs. Vance, and her proud head resting upon his broad bosom, as it would henceforth evermore rest. He was saying, as I approached them:

"Ida, in those long-ago summer days at Rockland Place, had I spoken, might I have hoped then?"

"You might."

THE END.







"What if I make this little favor the price of my concession to your wishes?"

# UNDER FOOT.

**A Novel.**

By ALTON CLYDE,

AUTHOR OF "MAGGIE LYNNE."

*Jeffries, Mrs. Arnold*

*ILLUSTRATED.*

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1870.



# UNDER FOOT.

## CHAPTER I.

### MARKED PRIVATE.

THE blustering March wind seemed to be running riot that afternoon, shaking the windows of the private office of Daniel Crawton, the wealthy principal of the firm of Crawton and Co. Though he was absent, his chair was not vacant, for a young man sat there, his nephew and junior partner, Mark Danson. He was lounging indolently back, softly stroking his sleek, light whiskers, and examining a letter with a look of curious speculation. He sat where his face caught the light. Seen thus, he gave the impression of a good-looking young man, about twenty-six or twenty-seven, not very tall, but stout, and fair-complexioned. It was the physique of one who might be always trusted to carry out the law of self-preservation. The fat, fair face had one peculiarity: it was destitute of color. Even in moments of passion and excitement the blood seldom showed itself there in a healthy glow. There was the same want of relieving shade, the same dull uniformity of tint, in the eyebrows and hair. Apart from this defect, it would have passed as a tolerably pleasant face, with observers who were not deep students of human character; but to those who could detect them, there were secretive, sinister lines about the mouth, and a crafty, insincere look in the eyes, which had a curious trick of contracting their pupils, and hiding under the dropped lids. Altogether, there was that about the face which ought to have put his friends on the defensive. Yet Mr. Mark Danson was a plausible, fair-spoken young gentleman, who made more way than any one in the favor of his stern uncle, and generally managed to get his character taken upon trust by those about him.

"A woman's handwriting, and marked private," he muttered, slowly turning over the letter, and holding it up for closer inspection; "yes, undeniably a woman's; perhaps I should say a lady's, for it is small and delicate enough. For what purpose does this unknown feminine write to him, a wealthy old bachelor? Can it be any thing in the matrimonial line—a widow, with sinister designs? Pugh! that is simply absurd." Here he tossed the letter indignantly on the desk. "After all, it is only some beg-

ging-letter trick, and I am giving myself causeless apprehension, as usual. Mark, old fellow, clever as you have proved yourself in some things, you are little better than an idiot."

He rose from his chair, poked the fire in a vigorous way, that sent a rain of red cinders over the fender, then took a few hasty strides about the room, with his hands clasped behind him.

"I must be out of sorts, this afternoon," he said, stopping before his uncle's desk, and again taking up the letter, which seemed to possess a sort of fascination for him. "Do what I will, my thoughts still run in the same current. It is the old bugbear—fear of that family coming between me and the future for which I am working. Strange, I can not divest myself of a certain impression about this letter,—that it has something to do with my Uncle Robert. I have also an idea about the handwriting, but, unluckily, it is only an idea, and I want certainty. If I could only be sure!"

His white fingers toyed nervously with the letter, and his glance wandered to the quaintly-carved time-piece on the mantel, as he added, "I don't expect him this half hour; I would venture, if I could do it without bungling. But there is the risk, and after all it may be worth nothing; the governor has such crotchets about his letters, if he finds that one has been tampered with, he will never rest until he unearths the culprit. Still, it is strange, and I have my suspicions: if I could only get a glance at the contents! Can I do it? Yes! and if I bungle I must destroy—"

At that moment there was a low knock at the door. A shade of vexation passed over the young man's face as he said, "Come in," to the unwelcome intruder, at the same time dropping the letter and applying himself to the study of a ledger which chanced to be open before him, muttering between his teeth, "Confound the interruption, whatever it is! it may take some minutes from the half hour, and I must have time."

The door was opened by a thin, gray-haired man, with a worn, dejected face, and a weary, spiritless stoop of the shoulders, as though he had failed to win in the great race of life, and was painfully conscious of his defeat. He came in carrying a bundle of papers.

"Well, Royton, what is it?" sharply interrogated the junior partner, lifting his pale eyebrows and running his finger down a line of figures in affected abstraction.

"I want some instructions about these letters, Mr. Mark, and there is a consignment of goods for—"

The young master interrupted him in a tone of ill-concealed irritability, holding out his hand for the papers, which the clerk handed to him. "Very strange, Mr. Royton, I expected that you had already received all necessary instructions connected with your department. My uncle is out, and I have more than enough business on my hands for the present; but leave the letters to me, I will attend to them presently, and ring when they are ready for you."

Somewhat to his surprise, the man whom he had addressed as Royton did not show any inclination to act upon the summary hint of dismissal, but stood his ground, and looked at him, even taking the liberty of leaning his elbow on the desk. Within the last few moments a singular change had come over the gray-haired clerk; the shrinking, nervous manner that seemed so painfully conscious under observation, and sometimes drew down upon him the ridicule of his fellow-clerks, was thrown off, and in its place was something which Mark Danson could not define. The altered expression of the face puzzled him. It was still the manner of a nervous man, but one under the influence of powerful excitement, goading himself to some desperate effort. Mark was at a loss; it was an entirely new phase, and mystified him, but he folded his arms as if gathering force to meet the unexpected demand, and leaned over the ledger. Then their eyes met, and for some seconds the two continued gazing at each other, such a look as does not pass between those who have any link of friendly fellowship.

"Mr. Mark Danson," faltered the old clerk.

Still resting on his folded arms, Mark answered, slowly, "Mr. Giles Royton, it strikes me that, as business men, we are wasting time to little purpose. Will you tell me the meaning of this singular pantomime?"

"I will," was the response. He bent down and whispered a few words in the young man's ear. Their effect on the listener was startling. He recoiled, then bounded from his seat, and with a smothered imprecation, caught Royton by the arm, a dull heat kindling in his face, where the color so rarely came. At last Mark Danson was moved.

## CHAPTER II.

### COMING TROUBLES.

"How unpleasant," murmured the querulous voice of Robert Crawton, as he turned irritably on his couch and made a feeble effort to rearrange his cushions, repeating, "how unpleas-

ant to have Mrs. Crawton called away, just when she was attending to my comforts. I take care to give as little trouble as possible; but I notice it is invariably the case, that these disagreeable interruptions occur when any thing is about to be done for me."

The sentence ended in a sigh of discontented repining, nothing new to the two or three devoted ones who moved daily about that little chintz-covered couch, and ministered to the innumerable wants of its ailing occupant. He looked round him with a consciously victimized air, and mentally consoled with himself as a much-enduring martyr to circumstances over which he had no control.

"Is there any thing that I can do for you, papa?" asked a sweet feminine voice, suddenly breaking the silence. It came from a tall fair girl, seated near the window, laboriously stitching, as she had sat since early morning, plying her busy needle with a diligence that never seemed to weary, rarely pausing to lift her head or allow her rapid fingers a moment's rest. She worked, not as though she had taken up some light task to beguile a leisure hour, but like one who has a purpose, stitching on with a sort of desperate energy of determination, as if she realized that much depended on the work of her hands, and had silently set herself a task to accomplish within a certain time. She repeated her question—"Is there any thing I can do for you, papa?"

The invalid glanced towards her, and his puckered brows relaxed just a little; but the fretful look remained, and when he spoke, his voice had the same complaining twail, "What, Margaret, still sewing there? you are so quiet that I had forgotten you were in the room. You must be a decided mope, child, or you would try to enliven me with a little cheerful talk."

For an instant there was a pained expression in the girl's eyes, and a touch of heightened color drifted into her pale face. But it passed quickly, and there was no sign of agitation in her low, calm voice as she said, "I am hurried with my work papa; it must be finished by four o'clock to-day. I did not talk, because I had nothing cheerful to talk about. But you have not told me if I can do any thing for you."

"Yes, my dear, you may get me a little fresh toast and water, and perhaps you might manage to make my cushions a trifle more comfortable; though I know you will not do it like your mother. Margaret, you fall far beneath her in the qualities of a good nurse."

The girl did as she was desired, saying, quietly, "You are right, papa, I fall beneath my mother in many good qualities, among the rest, patient endurance. I have more of the iron power of resistance in me, and am not so good and amiable; for such things always seem to harden me, and I feel compelled to say or do something to mark my sense of the injustice."

The invalid put up his wasted hands in a feeble, expostulating way. "Margaret, you seem now to overpower me with words. This

is generally the way, my dear, you either talk too much or too little; and sometimes, as now, I can not quite follow your meaning."

He raised himself on his elbow as he spoke, and his eyes seemed to search his daughter's face in some anxiety as he waited for her answer.

She caught the look, and her own grew troubled, as she said with deepening color, "Papa, I would rather not pursue this subject; but I will explain, as you wish me. I mean the little unconscious tyrannies which we are all too apt to exercise over those who love us best, and therefore bear most from us—those over whom we have the greatest power. These are small wounds to talk of, but I think they are harder to bear than great ones, for there is less shield against them; and this is what I meant when I said that I was not good and amiable like my mother. I could not go on as she does, bearing every thing so meekly, without a word of complaint. No, I am not like her."

Fair Margaret Crawton spoke in the tone of quiet decision so characteristic of her, but she bowed her stately neck, as though she felt there was something humbling in the confession, "that she was not like her mother." And tears welled up slowly under her long veiling lashes, but were not suffered to fall. It needed nothing more to show how gentle Mrs. Crawton was revered by her child.

The invalid sighed as he caught the expression of the bending face.

"That is true, Margaret. You have something of my temper. I have recognized it often. The old spirit that belongs to our family. The same which has kept your uncle Dan and I enemies for years. If we had been of a more yielding race, we should long since have made up our quarrel. Strange, I was dreaming about him last night—a dream that travelled back a long way, for I thought we were at school together, and Dan had been thrashing one of the bigger boys for calling me names and cheating me at marbles. He is my only brother, and I like to recall these rare instances of his affection. When the soil is barren, we think the more of any stray blossoms that may chance to crop out. Looking back now through our divided lives, I think it a good thing to keep fresh those memories; it gives me gentler thoughts of my brother, and may help me to forget his hardness to me and mine."

At that moment they were startled by the sharp slamming of a door, followed by the shuffle of feet in the passage and the sound of loud talking. Mr. Crawton writhed on his couch, and looked inquiringly at his daughter. His nervous system was morbidly sensitive, and harsh sounds distressed him to a painful degree. All the household were aware of his peculiarity, and accustomed to respect it.

"What is the meaning of that noise, Margaret? Can all that loud talking have any thing to do with your mother's visitor? I have not yet been informed why she left me in such a

hurry. Listen! That must be Chriss, and it sounds as if she was getting angry. Open the door, my dear; it is not pleasant to be kept in ignorance of what is going on."

Before Margaret could obey, the door was opened from the outside, and her mother stood on the threshold with raised forefinger, pointing apprehensively to the couch where the sick man lay in such a position that he could not see her, being partially hidden behind a large screen which had been thoughtfully improvised to protect him from draughts. From her mother's agitated manner, and the wistful, anxious glance which accompanied the movement of her hand, Margaret understood that there was something unpleasant to be kept from her father's knowledge, at least for the present, until the weight of trouble, whatever it might be, had been broken, and the effect softened by the gentle influence which was always on the alert to spare him pain and annoyance. For no sorrow fell upon his sheltered head that could possibly be withheld by the strong, tender heart, that was ever ready to interpose itself as his shield—the mighty spirit of woman's love, which, like some guardian angel, was keeping silent, ceaseless watch over his life.

### CHAPTER III.

#### WHAT PASSED BETWEEN THEM.

GILES ROYTON shook the grasp from his arm, and recoiled a few paces. Unwonted passion had for the present forced him out of his habit of weak submission to others. He had come into Mark Danson's presence that afternoon, goaded by the pressure of a wrong, the knowledge of which had been worn in his heart for months like a corroding sore. As he stood there, secretly chafing under the cool contempt of the man who had injured him and his, the slumbering fire within him suddenly leaped into flame, and excitement hurried on the crisis for which he had been waiting and watching. He was there as Mark Danson's accuser; but, from the force of habit, and a certain degree of personal fear, of which he could not divest himself, he seemed to shrink before the passion he had roused.

The younger man was not slow to follow up his advantage, and take the higher ground, perhaps as a shelter for himself.

"What does this mean, Giles Royton?" he asked, fiercely. "Are you going mad?"

"Not unless you have driven me, though goodness knows there has been enough to do it. Ask my daughter Eleanor."

"Your daughter!" repeated the other with sullen anger. "What has she to do with me?"

A vivid rush of color burned for an instant in the face of the gray-haired clerk, then faded out, leaving it as pale as Mark's own, and his hands caught the edge of the desk, grasping it with straining vehemence that made the veins stand out like knots of purple cords. He spoke

in a choking voice, "This is worse than I reckoned on, even from you, Mr. Danson, since you can turn round and ask me that question in cold blood, knowing what I know of your miserable secret. Would to Heaven I could answer that Eleanor is nothing to you, for, in spite of the difference in our worldly positions, I am not proud to own you as her husband."

"I begin to fear that this is really a case of mental derangement," commented the young master, with a desperate effort at coolness, opening his pen-knife and commencing a savage attack on a quill-pen. "Mr. Royton, I should suspect that you had been drinking, if I did not know that it is not one of your sins. But perhaps you were unfortunate at *play* last night; that may account for all."

It was a cruel shaft, and cruelly aimed; for gambling was Giles Royton's bane—the one concealed vice which was at the root of all his troubles. Chance had revealed this to Mark Danson, also that the man lived in dread of his secret coming to the knowledge of Daniel Crawton, knowing that it would be followed by immediate discharge from his situation, for the old merchant was rigidly scrupulous about the morals of those whom he employed. For purposes of his own, the wily Mark had taken some trouble to make himself master of circumstances, and had been mean enough to use his knowledge as an instrument of power over the unfortunate man; consenting to keep his secret only on certain conditions of humiliating subjection, which he never failed to exact when occasion required. About that time he was introduced to Eleanor Royton, the clerk's only daughter, to whom he had believed himself warmly attached. Without the knowledge of her father, he pursued the acquaintance, and, two years previous to the opening of our story they had been privately married—a step which he now bitterly regretted, for mercenary reasons. It was in vain that the young wife urged him to the fulfillment of his long-deferred promise, to acknowledge their marriage; he had made up his mind to delude her with false hopes, though he knew that grief for the change in him was already wearing down her health. The discovery that she had carried out her threat, and betrayed their secret to her father, disturbed him more than he was willing to admit. He spoke again in his cold, mocking way, still chipping his pen in a merciless fashion.

"I hope your losses have not been very heavy, Mr. Royton. If a ten-pound note will be any avail, it is at your service; but understand," he added with emphasis, "there must be strict confidence between us on all points without exception—yes, all points," he repeated, slowly, feeling the edge of the blade as he closed his pen-knife, and looking keenly into the agitated face of his companion.

"This is like you, Mark Danson, to add insult to injury; then offer a man money, as though his feelings were so much merchandise. But you mistake me; I would not touch your gold

now to save me from starving. Poor, fallen, as I may be, I am still man enough for that. I want nothing from you but justice to my daughter and your wife—Eleanor Danson."

"She has never borne that name," said Mark, starting as if the sound had stung him.

"But you know that it is legally hers."

"Well, suppose it is; and granting the truth of all you say, Mr. Royton, what do you wish me to do?"

"Acknowledge the marriage to your uncle, and take your wife home."

Mark smiled and showed his regular white teeth, as he answered, "Very good, most considerate of fathers-in-law; but it can't be done—at least for the present. Hark! that must be the governor," he cried, with a sudden start, adding, under his breath, "confound it! the half hour is up, and I have lost my chance of seeing the letter. Royton, get back to your desk at once; it will not look well for my uncle to see you wasting time here."

But the clerk did not stir.

"Be reasonable," continued Mark, excitedly, catching his arm as the step drew nearer; "unless you wish to ruin her cause and yours. I will see Eleanor myself to-night."

"You promise?"

"Yes; in the mean time be discreet, and keep my secret as I have kept yours. Two years ago, a word from me would have expelled you from the firm, and would do it now. Quick, my uncle's suspicions are easily excited."

He hurried him out of the office, calling after him, in a loud business tone, "Get through the other correspondence, Royton; I will see to these letters myself."

Just then the door opened and admitted Daniel Crawton, a tall old man with iron-gray hair, deep, far-seeing gray eyes, and a stern, decisive cast of face, clearly cut and strongly lined.

With a simple, "Well, Mark," he walked straight to his desk, and as though he had expected to find it there, pounced at once upon the letter which had caused his nephew such uneasiness.

Watching him closely from where he stood, Mark saw his face change and his hand tremble, as he glanced at the address on the envelope. And his curiosity was further excited by hearing his uncle murmur to himself, "Something has happened; it is her handwriting. I could swear to it among a thousand!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN POSSESSION.

WHILE Mrs. Crawton was holding silent communication with her daughter on the threshold of the parlor door, and Mr. Crawton was irritably insisting on his right to be informed of what was going on, a different scene was enacting in another part of the house. The entrance-passage of the Crawtons' house terminated in a



small back parlor, at the open door of which, firmly planted on a chair, as though it were an entrenched position, which he meant to hold in defiance of all opposition, sat a short, stout man, with broad, burly shoulders, which he shrugged at intervals in an unpleasantly suggestive manner. All his faculties were on the alert, and his utmost capacity of vision seemed strained to the necessity of keeping vigilant watch on the movements of an active antagonist, who had taken up a defiant position in front. She was a tall woman, with a development of bone and muscle and a towering height of stature, that was secretly respected by the short man in the chair. She had quick bright eyes, a sharp tongue, and a rugged brown face, where Time seemed to have notched a register of dates. This was Chriss, who represented in herself the entire domestic establishment of the Crawtons, being sole housekeeper and servant. She had begun life in the service of Mrs. Crawton's mother, as nursemaid. Her present mistress had been the baby under her care. That was perhaps the reason why she had singled her from all the rest as an object for especial devotion, clinging to her with a fidelity that partook of the spirit of the old days of chivalry. When the young lady married, Chriss still followed her fortunes, nursed her children as they came, and finally, when dark days of trouble fell on the family, and adversity saw Mrs. Crawton with broken health and premature threads of silver in her soft brown hair, the humble follower was still there with her unflinching courage and robust physical strength, to help to lighten the burden and soften the hard realities of her lot. This seemed to have become the purpose for which the good creature lived. It was the working of the beautiful law of compensation, by which the all-merciful Father accommodates the burden to the shoulders of his children, and tempers the storm-winds to their human needs and weaknesses. This was the antagonist, upon whom the short man sat scowling suspiciously, looking round him with a kind of covert apprehension, as though he expected some assault, and was not certain which would be the point chosen for attack. The appearance of Chriss at that moment, was certainly sufficient to justify his suspicions. She had come up hurriedly from the kitchen, with her sleeves tucked above her elbows and specks of flour adhering to her bare arms. There was hostile purpose in her eyes, as she stood grasping the handle of a broom, which the man rightly conjectured would become a very formidable weapon in those sinewy hands.

"Ferocious female," he growled, with a wavy motion of his hands, and a watchful look in his eyes, seizing the first chance of making himself heard when Chriss stopped speaking for want of breath—"ferocious female," he repeated, "don't you know this violence is against the law, and you could be taken up for trying to break the peace, besides insulting an officer doing nothing but his duty? I'm one of the men in possession,

and I've a right to stop here till further orders, and stop I will."

"Oh, indeed; will you?" answered Chriss, in a tone of exasperating contempt, accompanied by an unpleasantly suggestive movement of her broom. "And you've the impudence to call yourself in possession, after sneaking into respectable people's houses, and sitting yourself down on respectable people's chairs, without saying, 'By leave;' but it takes two to make a bargain, and—"

He interrupted her. "I tell you it's the law—a queer thing for you to meddle with, 'specially if you go insulting one of its officers."

"One of its officers!" repeated the wrathful defender of the family interests, measuring him with a glance that foreboded danger.

"Yes; can't you understand that we've a writ against your master, put in for the rent, and it ain't no earthly use you trying on this game of violence; for if you mean mischief with that ere weapon," he hastily added, keeping a prudent watch on the movements of the enemy, "all I've got to say is, that it'll be the worse for you and the people of the house."

But, undismayed by his warning, and in defiance of the law and its representative, Chriss seemed bent upon a measure of forcible ejection, and there is little doubt that things would not have gone on very smoothly for the man in possession, if a timely interruption had not occurred at that critical moment when Chriss was mentally matching her own strength against his.

Unheard by the excited woman, a step came softly along the passage, and a delicate white hand was laid upon the arm that held the threatening broom.

It was Mrs. Crawton's low voice that spoke hurriedly in her ear. "Chriss, this violence will do no good. I asked you to go quietly down stairs. I am sorry that you have not done so."

Chriss looked at her mistress, with the fire slowly dying out from her eyes. At the same instant her hand was drawn into a clasp, and she felt the soft fingers clinging round her own, as the low voice again whispered in her ear—

"Dear old Chriss, I know you mean well, but it does no good. The man must be left to do his duty in his own way. Leave him to me, he will be civil enough, if he is not angered. Now I want you to put me pen, ink, and paper in the back parlor. I am going to write a letter, you can guess to whom. It is our last resource, Chriss; the only hope of our deliverance from this new trouble. Has Hugh come in yet?"

"No, ma'am."

Chriss prepared to obey her mistress without deigning another glance in the direction of her enemy. At that moment a second man made his appearance on the scene. He came from the rear of the house, with a pen behind his ear, and an open memorandum-book in his hand, as though he had been taking notes. It was the sheriff's officer. He was going towards the room where the invalid Mr. Crawton lay;

but the anxiously-observant wife touched his shoulder, and whispered a few words. He turned and bowed with a politeness that went sadly with his present occupation and his air of decayed respectability. At a sign from his companion he stopped, and they conferred together for a few minutes. At the end he said aloud—

"Never mind, Simmons; it mayn't be quite the strict letter of business, but we mustn't be too hard on the poor people. Let the women have their own way, as far as we can, and keep a civil tongue. It's like oiling the locks as we go on, they open all the easier, and it saves trouble in the end."

To this bit of philosophical advice, a gruff monosyllable was the only answer vouchsafed by the surly listener.

## CHAPTER V.

### BROUGHT TOGETHER.

It was the evening of the day on which Daniel Cawton found the letter marked "private" awaiting him on his office desk—a wet evening, raining with hopeless persistence: the wind whirled the rain here and there, driving it in blinding clouds into the faces of unhappy pedestrians, who had to pilot their way under difficulties through the crowded thoroughfares. A truly unpleasant state of things, to be detained on the sidewalk waiting for the chance of a crossing, particularly to those bound on errands of importance; or for impatient spirits, disposed to chafe under delays, like the elderly gentleman who suddenly emerged from one of the turnings into Cornhill, and pushed on with quick, determined tread, like one accustomed to put down difficulties, and clear his own way, wherever it might be. That he belonged to the respectable classes of society, might be inferred from his dress, with its comfortable wrappings and defenses against the weather, and a certain air which he had about him of solid, British respectability, suggestive of solvent credit and a good balance at the banker's. He was so closely muffled, with the collar of his great coat turned over his ears, and was so effectually screened by a capacious gig umbrella, that little of his face was visible; and that little was not encouraging, for a beggar-boy, who had just sidled up to ask alms, allowed him to pass on unsolicited, crouching back in his misery and rags, repelled by the stern eyes which had looked him down from under their bent, frowning brows. The gentleman was evidently in haste, and walked briskly until his way was suddenly checked by a block of vehicles. He stood on the curb in a high state of irritation, muttering, in a vexed tone—

"Wants a reform in the way of managing the street traffic. Something wrong about these obstructions; but of course it will be nobody's fault, and nobody's business. Here I am, behind time, and that blockhead Thompson, who

can not develop more than one idea at a time, will not have the sense to drive to my club, but will keep the mare in the wet, and give her cold. Mark might attend to these things, but, as usual, he has his hands full of his own business. Eh? what!" he interjected, turning sharply round to scrutinize the owner of a faded silk umbrella, which had just come in violent contact with his own.

He found himself confronted by a pair of clear brown eyes, that returned his gaze with a fearless frankness, and seemed to say, "I am honest and shrink from no man." Attracted by the eyes, the stranger scrutinized farther, and saw that it was a young man about twenty-three, tall like himself, with a frank English face, that inspired confidence with the first glance, and confirmed the expression of his eyes. It was a noble cast of head, finely poised upon the shoulders, and giving promise of action as well as thought. The old gentleman noted all, even the warmly-tinted ripples of brown hair which clustered in masses of curls, forming a coronet on the white forehead. He was inclined to be pleased with the young man's appearance, and favorably impressed by his self-reliant bearing and easy freedom of manner, as he raised his hat, and said, good-humoredly—

"Beg pardon, sir. It's not easy to make one's umbrella behave properly in this wind."

To which the other replied, absently, "Oh, no; of course not."

He seemed to find something strangely engrossing in the study of the young face, at which he gazed so intently that the stranger became conscious, and flushed under his scrutiny, though he returned it with a direct look that asked, "What do you want to know about me, sir?"

When he had turned away, the old gentleman still gazed after him, muttering, "Can't tell where I have seen that face, yet it seems familiar. A handsome young fellow, but he seems careworn and troubled, in spite of his cheery tone. I suppose he is one of the many hundreds of poor fellows who are out of employment, and gradually sinking into the lower ranks, there to increase the burden of taxation already dragging down honest, hard-working men."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, the young man whose face had so singularly attracted him moved on to the corner, where he stood on the curb, evidently waiting, like himself, for the chance of a crossing. Thus, brought together for an instant, these two were about to drift from each other's sight, strangers, as they had met and parted, neither knowing of the other whence he came, nor whither he was bound, nor guessing that their currents of fate would ever cross again. So they stood apart in the crowded streets, with the rushing tide of human interests and passion rolling between them like a dividing flood. Yet, though they knew it not, their threads of life were to be woven together from that night.

The young man was conscious of a feeling

of curiosity towards the tall old man with the formidable umbrella, who had watched him so closely. He wondered what could have invested his face with such singular interest for one whom he never remembered to have seen before. Thinking thus, he turned round, and ran his eyes rapidly along the crowded footpath in the hope of again catching sight of the stranger. It was not long before he distinguished him, but was startled to see him in the act of attempting to cross the road, rashly ignoring the advance of a double file of omnibuses and cabs, which seemed to unite at that point, and lose themselves in the maze of confusion, which the roar of wheels, the cracking of whips, and the angry shouts of exasperated drivers did not assist to lessen. The old gentleman had not advanced more than a few steps when his foot slipped, and he fell heavily, making a vain but desperate effort to extricate himself with his umbrella. At the same moment a Hansom dashed recklessly round the corner. The horse had just received a cut of the whip, and was coming at full speed. It was close upon the prostrate man before the driver, bewildered by the shouts of the bystanders, could comprehend what was the obstruction in his horse's way. There was no hope for it; the warning had reached him too late. The crowd on the footpath gazed with horrible fascination on the spot where the man lay, and one or two sensitive females with weak nerves and hysterical tendencies, screamed and showed symptoms of fainting; but all was over before they had time to develop.

## CHAPTER VI.

"HAVE YOU NO LOVE-STORY OF YOUR OWN, NELLY?"

"MY Queen Margaret, is it really you, at last! I have watched for you since four o'clock, for I scarcely dared to hope you would come, even after I received your answer to my note."

"Yet you might have known that I would not disappoint you on your birthday, if I could possibly help it, Eleanor;" and Margaret Cawton bent forward and returned the warm kiss with which her friend had greeted her—returned it quietly, as she did all things—coldly, some might have thought; but it would have been only those who did not know her. The old school friend could accept it as Margaret's way, for she knew how much of sterling gold there was in that nature, and had proved how deep and strong were the currents of feeling underlying that apparently calm and undemonstrative manner.

Margaret submitted to let herself be divested of her street wrappings, and turned round for a little admiring inspection by her friend, who had an artist's eye for natural beauty and grace of effect. It was sure to be gratified in Margaret Cawton, whatever she might wear; it seemed to be always the thing that suited her individ-

ally. No high-born belle of a London season could hit off the art of dressing with finer tact or more perfect success than Margaret. There was something almost primitive in the simplicity of the gray stuff dress, falling about her figure in such soft folds, with the tiny frill of lace encircling her round, white throat, and the simple band of blue velvet crossing the magnificent roll of dark hair. It would have been difficult to have found a toilette more becoming the wearer, yet there was nothing new about it. Margaret's friend had seen that dress many times before, for it had been very carefully preserved, and could have borne its own testimony to the painful, pinching economy which was so severely felt in the Cawton household.

Let us take the two friends as they stand together. They are equal in point of stature, and about the same age, though the daughter of Giles Royton looks older by some years. There are lives which are lived out prematurely, where the work of years is condensed into days. Eleanor's was one of these. Margaret Cawton had her share of trials; but they were not of the kind that weaves gray threads in the hair, and indents the brow with premature lines—the mental suffering that quickly wears out the spring bloom, and falls on the young heart like the blight of untimely frost. The two friends had been school-girls together; but Eleanor Royton felt herself much farther removed from those early days, for it seemed to her that she had eaten of the "fruit of the tree of knowledge" before Margaret had left behind her girlhood. It was even so; she had passed through the deepest and saddest phases of a woman's experience, and added to her life a sealed page, which she shrank even in thought from revealing to the friend who had been wont to share all her secrets.

In person, as well as character, Eleanor was a contrast to Margaret Cawton. Hers was a delicate, fragile loveliness, that suggested the need of cherishing care and tender nurture, for she did not look physically strong. There was nothing stately about that slight figure and pure, fair face, with the thoughtful blue eyes and crown of sunny hair, which had been Margaret's special admiration in the days when it was suffered to fall about her shoulders in a shower of curls. She had loved to wind them about her fingers, and stroke down the golden ripples that touched it here and there like gleams of sunshine. It was easy to see what a beautiful creature Eleanor Royton had been in her early girlhood, when her fair brow had none of the anxious, sorrowful lines which gave her face a world-worn, weary look, sad and unnatural for her years. It was easy also to see in her one of those deep, passionate natures, full of dangerous, clinging tenderness, to whom love would be a fate for good or ill—one who might be expected to stake on it her whole life's happiness, and gain or lose all by the issue.

"How is your father, dear?" asked Eleanor, as she put aside her visitor's bonnet and cloak.

"About the same," sighed Margaret. "I am afraid there is little chance for him, unless he could be got out to a warmer climate. As usual, I have nothing cheerful to tell you, dear." Here followed a recital of family troubles, which Margaret poured out without reserve. "I am selfish to distress you with my gloomy talk, Eleanor. Have you been ill?" she added, suddenly, scanning her friend's face, which looked to her thin and worn.

"No, dear; only a little weakness," was the reply, spoken with a forced smile. "Perhaps I stay indoors too much; and it may be indolence, for since my father obtained his present situation, he will never let me take in work if he can help it."

"He does right," affirmed Margaret, decisively. "You have earned the right to rest, for you worked very hard in the days of need, before your mother died."

"Poor mother!" faltered Eleanor; for her friend's words had called up a rush of painful remembrances; "she passed away in our sorest poverty. It is hard to think of her lying so long on a sick-bed, deprived of the little comforts which she needed so much. When the time came that we could have procured them for her, it was too late."

"But you did what you could," added Margaret. "It may be that she was taken in mercy, to be spared sorrows that you can not foresee."

For an instant Eleanor's great blue eyes scrutinized Margaret's face with a look of quick inquiry, as though she suspected some hidden meaning in the words which had found a sad echo in her own heart. The young girl could not have spoken more appropriately, if she had really known the unhappy secret of her friend's private marriage. That would indeed have been a sorrow to the dead mother.

"Come into the back parlor, Margaret; this room feels chill," said Eleanor, with a sudden shiver. "I did not have the fire lighted here, because the other room is so much snugger and warmer; and yours is not a visit of ceremony."

Thus talking, with their arms wound about each other, after the fashion of school-girls, the two friends passed into a plainly-furnished but comfortable-looking room, where a bright fire was burning, and the tea-tray laid for two, with Eleanor's little servant (a zealous, if not very efficient, satellite) in attendance to fetch any thing that might be needed from the kitchen below. Ann was a poor little waif, whom Eleanor's charity had rescued from starvation in the streets.

Contrasted with their past experience, these were days of comparative prosperity for the Roytons. The father held a good situation in the firm of Crawton and Co. The only drawback was his unfortunate love of gambling, which narrowed their means, and cast another shadow over Eleanor's life.

"What a time we have sat over our tea, Nelly! I am glad it is over, at last. Now for one

of our old evening talks, which you know I am so fond of. Bring your chair close to mine, and turn down the lamp; I like the fire-light best."

So spoke Margaret, unconsciously taking the lead even in little things, and directing arrangements, as it always seemed natural for her to do. Eleanor did her bidding at once.

"Do you know, Queen Margaret, you would make quite a picture, as you sit now, with the red glow of the fire on your hair? and I think I could name some one who would do it justice on canvas."

The reply to this remark was a vivid blush, a quick, conscious rush of color, that would have been a revelation in itself, without that pretty shy droop of the white eyelids—something that quite changed the character of Margaret's finely-chiselled face, and gave it just the warmth and light that was, perhaps, needed to make it really lovable and womanlike.

A sudden impulse made Eleanor wind her arms about her friend, and draw her closer, while a low, painful wail, born of her own saddest knowledge and experience, surged up from the depths of her full heart. "God grant her a happier lot than mine! She has given away her heart. Oh! that the precious gift may never be slighted in the days to come."

But Margaret heard nothing of that sorrowful whisper.

"You are thinking of Charles Marston," she said, softly.

"Yes, dear, I am."

"Because he is an artist, and likely to be associated with pictures."

"Not exactly on that account," smiled Eleanor; "but because I know he would be likely to take a tender interest in the subject."

Another blush, and a little quickened throbbing under the bodice of the gray dress. Then Eleanor's hand was suddenly clasped.

"Nelly, it is of him that I want to talk to you to-night."

"I shall be glad to listen, darling. Open your heart—you know that I am a safe confidante."

Thus invited, stately Margaret Crawton, who seemed another being that night, slipped from her chair, and crouching on the rug at Eleanor's feet, with her blushing face hidden on her knee, opened her heart without restraint to that patient listener, and told all her woman's story, with its shifting hopes and fears, timid questionings and shy, fluttering doubts. It was all familiar to Eleanor—another reading of the old-world story of love, the one grand epic of human lives.

"I know it all now, darling," said Eleanor, "and I shall expect a large return of love for my Margaret, for I know her to be one of those whose life would be made a dreary waste by falsehood or broken trust."

She was looking into the fire as she spoke, with a sad yearning look which Margaret would not have understood, her great eyes full of tears

that did not fall, for every word of the tender story to which she had just listened had been like an unconscious touch of the hidden wound which she carried in her heart.

"I think—I believe he loves me, Eleanor," whispered Margaret, timidly, the strange new softness showing more strongly, in her voice

future and his—no, not his," she corrected hurriedly: "I see for him fortune and fame, the well-earned reward of all his years of toil. At last he has got a picture accepted by the Academy, and something whispers in my heart that it will be a success—that he will become one of those whom the world is proud to honor, and the



Margaret Crawton opened her heart without restraint to that patient listener.

and manner. "But there are times when"—she stopped abruptly, and Eleanor felt her hand tremble, but she did not interrupt, judging it best to let the full heart unburden itself; Margaret resumed—"times when I do not feel sure, and clouds seem to shut out the light from my

rich and great are ready to smile upon, and receive in their circles." She had raised her face, and was talking rapidly, with unwonted color in her cheeks, and a bright light in her eyes.

"And what do you see for yourself?" questioned Eleanor, gently.



Margaret shook her head. "Nothing but the old routine of toil and care. I have known little else since I was a child, though I ought not to complain, for my mother does her best to lighten my share of the burden. But I disguise nothing from you, Eleanor. You know how miserably poor we are. Our old servant Chriss tries hard to keep up the fiction of better days, but it is no use—we keep going down, down. My brother Hugh has been out of a situation for months, and nothing seems to prosper with us—always the same wearing struggle with narrow means. And Charles knows it all—that is one of my shadows; he is so sensitive and refined, and I know him to be ambitious. Is it not enough to disgust and make him shrink from us?"

"Not if he deserves to win you, Margaret. It will only make him proud to think that his love can give you a sheltered nest."

"Oh, Eleanor! I am putting it in another light. A poor marriage may be a fetter on his success, and he may come to feel it so, and regret his choice. If it were so, and I knew it, I think it would kill me. I could bear any thing better than that," she added, suddenly. "My father often tells me I am like the Crawtons, and they were always proud."

"But now you are troubling yourself without cause, Margaret. Test the quality of the gold, before you doubt it."

The girl had dropped into her old attitude on the hearth-rug, with her head on Eleanor's knee, listening, while she soothed and counselled, as if Margaret had been an inexperienced younger sister, and she a sorrowful spinster, to whom love and marriage were things long since removed from the range of probabilities. This peculiarity struck Margaret, for she suddenly roused herself, saying—

"My dear, I can not make it out. You are no older than myself, yet you give such wise advice, and seem so well versed in all these questions; and I never remember you to have had any lovers, only that poor little German teacher, who used to follow you about, and whom you could not bear the sight of. How is it that you never talk of yourself? Have you no love-story of your own, Nelly?"

If she had seen the grieved quiver of Eleanor's lips, and felt the sudden throbbing of her heart, Margaret would not have repeated her question; but, happily, Eleanor was spared the necessity of answering, by the interruption of a knock at the street door, and she found voice to say—

"Here comes your brother, Margaret; and, as usual, the time has been too short for all we could find to say to each other."

When the door had closed upon her visitors, Eleanor sank wearily down in her chair, crying to herself, "When will there be an end of all this hateful concealment? Margaret gives me her full confidence, but I shrink from the light. What would she think of me, if she knew that I was already a wife?—her cousin,

too. It seems like stealing into the family in a false position. Oh, Mark, Mark! when will you repair this wrong to me?"

As she spoke, she drew from her bosom a silken cord, to which was attached a wedding-ring. She held it for a few moments, then put it hurriedly back, with a rain of passionate tears. She was recalling Margaret's question, to which that hidden ring was a sadly significant answer.

"Have you no love-story of your own, Nelly?"

## CHAPTER VII.

### SAVED.

It was the work of an instant. A fearless hand dashed at the horse's head, and seizing the bridle, forced it back on to its haunches, holding it with a grasp of power.

"Saved!" burst from the agitated throng, as a dozen eager hands were stretched forward to the old man's assistance. It was a gallant action, gallantly done, and did not fail to elicit admiring comments, for it was only a youth whose cool daring had been the means of saving a life—a youth, who looked as though he had been born for the doing of noble deeds, as he stood with his tall, slight figure erect, his cheeks flushed, and his brown hair waving in the wind. His head was bare, for his hat had fallen off, and been trampled under the horse's feet, where it lay crushed and battered, scarcely distinguishable from the mud: a commonplace incident to record, but a serious misfortune to him, for, though he kept it to himself, his heart ached at the loss. It was the only hat that he possessed, and he had not the means of procuring another to replace it.

The old man was found to be little hurt, except from the effect of the shock and a bruise on the shoulder. His first words were thanks to his deliverer, whom he recognized at once as the young stranger whose face had so powerfully interested him.

"Are you hurt, sir?" the young man questioned, with a look of concern.

"Not much, thanks to you."

"I fear your shoulder is bruised by one of the horse's hoofs. Will you lean on me?"

"Thank you, no; I prefer trying to help myself, as I have been accustomed to do all my life." Here the speaker glanced at the uncovered head, and added, in the same curt manner, "You have lost your hat."

The youth colored, but frankly admitted the truth.

He replied, decisively, "That will be my affair; you must have it replaced. Nay," he added hastily, seeing the young man about to speak, "I hope you are not going to show any false pride in the matter, for I should like to think you are above it. Besides, it is my right, and I will not have it taken out of my hands."

Now you may oblige me by procuring a cab. I will be driven to my warehouse, which is not far from here, and get clear of this mud. Some of the clerks will be working late, so I can send for Thompson to come round and take me up from there."

Luckily, at that moment an empty cab was passing, which the young men hailed at once. He noticed that walking seemed to cost the old man a painful effort, but he did not again offer the help which had been refused. He waited until he was safely disposed of in the cab, then stood on the step, and before the door closed, held out his hand, thus gaining a full look into the sternly-cut face on which the glare of the gas-light fell strongly. Instead of his hand being taken as he expected, the deep voice, which he was somehow learning to like, struck in short, sharp, and decisive—

"What, young sir! you do not suppose that I am going to let you slip out of my sight like this, with a debit and credit account between us, and no balance struck—going without a hat!" This was interjected in a low-spoken "aside." He continued, aloud, "I want you to grant me a further favor—something new for me to ask. Will you do it?"

"Yes, sir, if it is within my power."

"Cautious for your years; that is a prudent answer. Now tell me where you are going."

"Home," replied the young man, coloring slightly.

"Good. I did not ask from mere curiosity, but simply because I want to know if you have any business on hand to prevent your giving me more of your time to-night. If you are at leisure, will you go with me?"

"Yes."

He needed no further invitation, but stepped in, and seated himself opposite his singular companion, who made a comment to himself, confiding it to the folds of his muffler.

"That is what I like—ready answers and prompt actions. I must know more about this stripling."

The door was now closed, the direction given to the driver, and the cab quickly lost sight of by the knot of lingering bystanders, who had honored it with their particular observation—chiefly disreputable boys, who smoked short pipes, with a most stoical indifference to the rain, and speculated among themselves about "the chances of that old party shelling out something 'ansome to the seedy-looking young swell who had lost his 'at."

Few words were exchanged during their drive by the two thus strangely brought together. The old man was so profoundly taciturn, that he might almost have been supposed to have forgotten that he had a companion. He was not naturally a talker, and perhaps the hurt to his shoulder, of which he had made so light, was beginning to make itself felt. But, however acutely sensible he might be to the pain, he had a hard grain of endurance in his nature, and would have scorned to complain.

The youth sat thinking his own thoughts, and speculating in his own way about his present adventure, and how it was likely to terminate. Apart from this, his mind was burdened with anxieties of another kind, and there was a shade of trouble overclouding his bright young face—trouble not less vividly real because it was capable of being thrown off by an effort of his will; and not less keenly felt because it had its root in sordid cares for common, every-day necessities, comprehending the mean shifts of poverty in the hand-to-hand fight with the world, and the hard battle of ways and means in the struggle to live. Poor, without employment, and with no present prospect of obtaining any, he had nothing before him from week to week but the weary tramp through the crowded streets, and the daily desperate search for work that could not be found—all made bitter to the proud, sensitive spirit by the consciousness that he was eating bread earned for him by the exertions of others. Not a very cheerful outlook for him, as he sat with hands thrust in his empty pockets, going he knew not where, but passively content to submit to the chances of fate, and, like a purposeless waif, drift with the current that was bearing him on.

The cab turned into one of the gloomy, secretive-looking streets in the vicinity of the Bank, and stopped before the great entrance door of a lofty, many-windowed building, bearing on an ambitious plate the well-known name of Daniel Cawton and Co. Lights were gleaming through some of the heavy-plated windows, and the hall gas was burning. As the old gentleman said, some of the clerks were working late that evening.

If his attention had not been just then engaged with the cabman, he would not have failed to notice the young stranger's sudden start and change of color when he read the name on the door-plate, spelling it slowly over to himself a second time, and whispering under his breath, "Is it possible? Cawton—Daniel Cawton. How will this adventure end for me?"

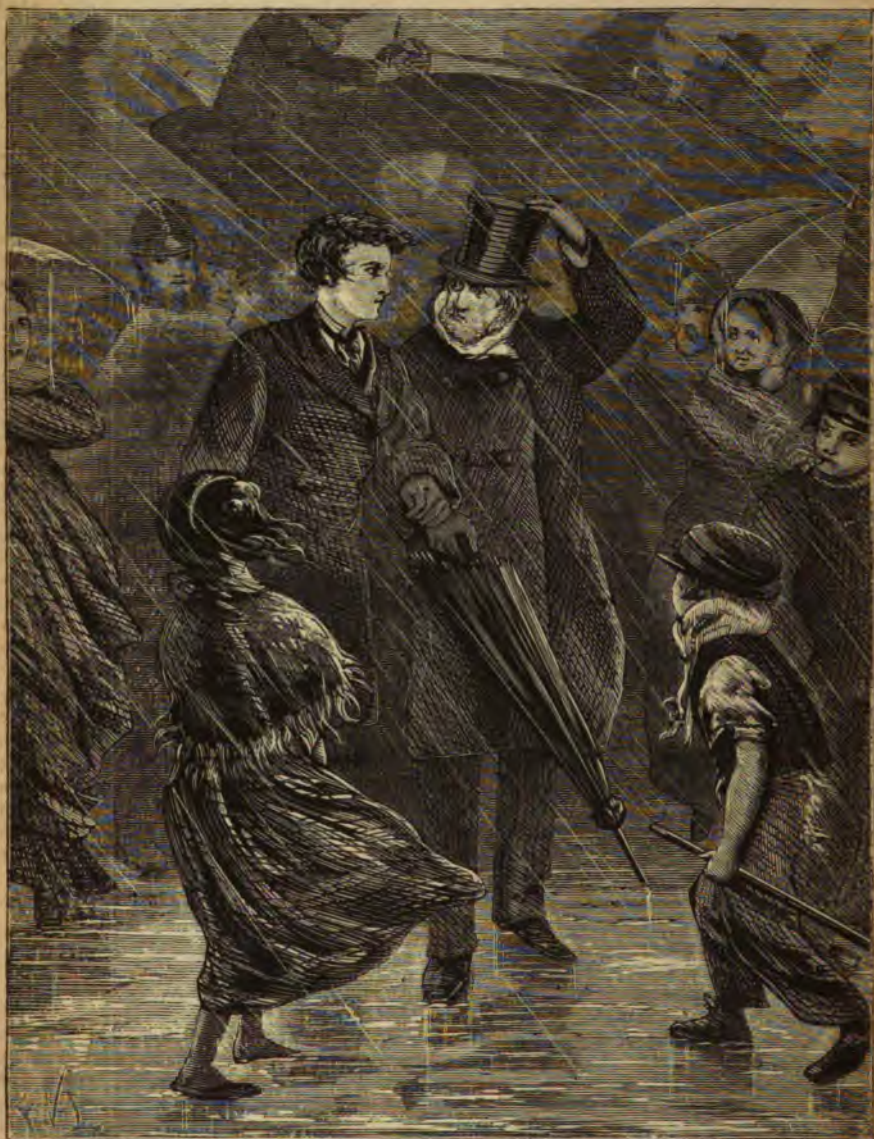
## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HOUSE IN ISLINGTON.

THERE was an unwonted shadow on Mark Danson's smooth face when he parted from his uncle on the afternoon that his privacy had been so unpleasantly intruded upon by Giles Royton. He had found it harder than usual to act out the part of fair seeming which he always kept up in the presence of the old merchant. He drew a long breath of relief when the door closed between him and the shrewd gray eyes whose penetration he had so much reason to dread. The habit of dissembling had become so essentially a part of himself, and the deceptive was so thoroughly grafted on the real in his nature, that he sometimes imposed upon

himself as well as others, and gave himself credit for good motives and qualities to which he could lay no claim. He sustained two characters, and lived two lives: one on the surface, outwardly irreproachable, and scrupulously attentive to all the conventional moralities, the pat-

ns to trace it through the shadows it will cast, and watch its tortuous windings through the stream of other lives that it will trouble. Mark had a purpose before him that evening, and was particularly anxious to get his uncle out of the way. There was a pressure of business,



"The chances of that old party shelling out something 'ansome to the seedy-looking young swell who had lost his 'at."

tern man of business, and zealously affectionate nephew, who never lost his temper under any provocation, and seemed devoted to his uncle's interests, which he appeared to consider were his own. Into the darker under-current of his nature we need not look; suffice it for

and some of the clerks—among the rest, Giles Royton—would be compelled to remain beyond the usual hour for closing. Mark feared that his uncle might conceive the idea that his own supervision would be necessary. But to his relief he learned that the carriage was ordered



early, and guessed that he intended spending the evening at his club.

Daniel Cawton was so strictly a man of method, lived so completely by rule, and regulated his actions with such punctilious regularity, that it was easy to calculate upon his movements on each day of the week.

It was not more than ten minutes before the cab containing the elderly gentleman and his new acquaintance stopped at the door that Mark Danson had passed hurriedly through the spacious counting-house, where he was greeted by the diligent scratching of pens from the busy clerks. He was so closely muffled that it might have been suspected he intended a disguise. He paused before Giles Royton's desk, and their eyes met. He warned him by a motion of his finger, and a meaning glance in the direction of the other clerks, as he said aloud—

"Have you nearly finished your invoices, Mr. Royton?"

Then stooping, as if to look over his sheet, he managed to pass a slip of paper into his hand, on which had been hastily scribbled in pencil:

I go to keep my promise. You know where. If there are any inquiries about me, and should any chance bring back my uncle before you close, remember what I expect from you—discretion and silence.

Giles Royton's sallow face paled as his lowering glance furtively followed the young master, and he made a blurred, blotted entry of figures in the line that he was casting. It had been remarked among his fellow-clerks that he had latterly become more reserved and sullen, holding himself farther aloof from them, which did not tend to increase the little popularity which he possessed.

It was quite dark, and raining heavily when Mark ran down the steps, and drawing the brim of his hat over his eyes, hurried to the nearest cab-stand, engaged the first he saw, and flung himself in, giving the driver the number of a house and the name of a street in Islington. Drawing up the windows, he threw himself gloomily back in a corner, with his legs extended on the opposite seat, and gave himself up to a careful review of his position. It did not inspire him with cheerfulness, for it shadowed out contingencies in the future, and suggested the presence of clashing interests and unpleasant complications, which had not very definitely entered into his calculations. He now found himself beset with difficulties which, for any thing he knew, might threaten to assail that for which he had fought so hard, his position as his uncle's favorite, and acknowledged heir. For in the midst of his successful scheming, with all the fair prospects that opened before him as the inheritor of the old man's wealth, he was often haunted by a torturing sense of insecurity, and never lost sight of the fact that he had a cousin, young Hugh Cawton, who might one day be his rival, the son of his uncle's only brother Robert, whom he had not seen since he was a boy at school. His only hope was in the con-

tinuance of the quarrel between the brothers. His safety lay in their estrangement, for he foresaw that their reconciliation would have the effect of bringing the dreaded Cousin Hugh into association with his uncle; then who could tell how it might influence his own fate? It was this fear that overshadowed his life. The mystery of the letter was cleared by a few involuntary exclamations that fell from his uncle during its perusal. But his worst suspicions were confirmed. He learned that it came from the Crawtons, whom he knew to be in indigent circumstances; also, that it contained an appeal for money. This discovery was in itself sufficient to disturb his mind, which had been already worked upon in the scene with Giles Royton, and by the revelation that the secret of his marriage had become known to him. Then there was the bitter consciousness that it was by his own free act that the goading fetter had been fastened round his neck.

"What will it avail me," he thought, moodily, as the cab threaded a maze of dimly-lighted streets in the parish of Islington, "what will it avail me that my uncle's ward, May Rivers, is an heiress, beautiful, accomplished, all that I could desire in a wife? what can she be to me, while there is this clog, that I can not shake off, dragging me down, and mocking all my efforts to rise?"

He was roused from his reverie by the stopping of the cab at the last of a row of small houses, with weedy patches of garden before their parlor windows, and a generally pervading air of shabby gentility. Mark alighted, paid the cabman, and opened for himself the creaking little gate that gave admission to the strip of gravel leading to the front door. His vigorous application of the knocker was answered by a small servant girl, who gave him a shy look of distrust as she stood, shielding, as well as she could, the flickering light of the candle which she carried in her hand; but the draught from the open door suddenly extinguished it, leaving the place in darkness. Mark heard her murmur to herself, "Drat it!"

"Is Miss Royton at home?" he asked, repressing a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see her?"

"Yes, sir. I'll go and tell her."

As soon as she could succeed in finding the handle of the door, the girl ushered him into the front parlor, which showed signs of very recent occupation. There was a lamp burning, and on the table an open book, with a paper-knife between the leaves, and a piece of light needle-work lying over the back of a chair, as if it had been just hastily flung there.

Mark Danson had not seen his young wife for many weeks, having put off his visits on various pretexts. He glanced round the room, which was filled with traces of Eleanor's presence. There was her pet canary in his cage, hanging in its usual place near the window, and her piano, his own gift. The only child of

Giles Royton had received an education above her father's social position. The walls of the room were adorned with some clever pencil sketches, which Mark knew were done by her hand, and he acknowledged to himself that she played almost as well as his uncle's ward, May Rivers. Eleanor was a lady in refinement of tastes and manners; there was nothing in her to make him shrink from introducing her to his own circle. As he passed the piano he glanced carelessly at the sheet of music on the stand, and should have been touched with a thrill of remorseful feeling when he recognized it as a love-song, an old favorite, which he had himself presented to Eleanor in the days before his fickle fancy cooled, and it was one of his pleasures to hear her play and sing.

He flung down his hat and gloves with a gesture of impatience, and roughly displacing the delicate crochet cover, threw himself heavily down on the little couch, which creaked and shook under his weight. He was not kept waiting many moments before he caught the rustling of a dress, and the sound of a step in the passage.

"Here she comes," he muttered to himself. "Now for a scene; but you have your part to play, Mark Danson. Keep firm, and don't make an ass of yourself for the sake of a woman. You know all that you have to gain or lose."

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE OFFICE.

"How will this end for me?" murmured the youth, as he followed the old man through the spacious office, with its long row of desks, over which the busy clerks were bending, engrossed with the work in hand. He glanced at them, longing to be one of their number. A few minutes more and he found himself in a handsome, well furnished room, which he rightly guessed to be the private office. His companion touched a bell, and a thin, sallow-faced man appeared. He seemed much surprised, and gave the young stranger a furtive glance.

"Light the gas, Royton."

"Yes, sir."

"And I shall want you to help me to get rid of this coat;" adding, by way of explanation, "I met with an accident just now, which nearly ended in my being crushed by a Hansom; but it's all over, and little harm done, except a few scratches and bruises. Has Mr. Mark left?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long since?"

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Did he leave any message?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

The man gave his answers in a profoundly respectful tone, that did not escape the notice of the young stranger. "Who can it be?" he murmured, as he gazed at them while the man called Royton assisted in taking off the damaged

overcoat. "It can not be—no; it must be the manager, or one of the partners."

Somewhat to his surprise, as soon as they were alone the old man walked to the hearth, without appearing to notice his presence, and taking up the poker, applied it to the sluggish fire with the energy of an impatient man. Seeing him thus for the first time divested of the heavy overcoat and muffler, he was more than ever impressed with the powerful build of the large, majestic figure, and as the light fell on the gray, lined face, with its massive jaw and full martial nostril, it looked resolute enough to accomplish any thing, and suited, he thought, to belong to some great general or governor of men. Then, and often afterwards, that face reminded him of a piece of grand rugged sculpture.

"Well, young sir," he began, abruptly turning round and facing the youth, with the poker still in his hand, "I've kept you waiting longer than I intended, and thereby tried your patience. You are beginning to get tired."

"Yes, sir, I am."

"And rather inclined to regret that I had not left you to go your own way, instead of asking you to come here. Was it not so?"

"Yes something of that did pass my mind," stammered the young man, flushing painfully under the searching glance, and inwardly marvelling at the keen intuition which had divined his thoughts.

"Ah, I am glad that you have the honesty to own the truth. If you had given me a different answer I should not have believed you, for I read it in your face."

"That might be," returned the young man, quietly, "for I was just calculating what time I should be likely to reach home, and I found it would be much later than I had anticipated."

"And was that a cause for uneasiness?" interrogated the old man, attentively regarding him.

"Yes, for I know it will make my mother anxious, and she has more than enough to trouble her now."

"Oh, indeed. Have you a father?"

"Yes, sir."

The querist was disappointed; the curt monosyllables matched his curt questions. The young man seemed determined to volunteer no information about his family.

"Over-cautions; I scarcely know what to make of you, my young friend," he thought, with a contraction of his massive brows; "but, after all, it is perhaps natural, for I remember I used to hate being asked questions about myself." At the same instant he struck the poker violently against a block of coal, shattering it into minute pieces. He smiled with grim satisfaction after that vigorous onslaught. It seemed to give vent to his humor, and he liked to feel himself doing energetic things.

At that moment there was a timid knock at the door. In reply to his loud "Come in," a tall, light-haired youth made his appearance on the threshold, carrying a couple of hat-boxes.

"All right, Richard, put them down, and when I want you again I will ring."

The stranger's face took a deeper tinge of color as the door was again closed upon them; he divined that it was a new hat to replace the one he had lost.

"That affair is quite understood between us," began the old man, pointing to the box, and eying him keenly; "I believe we decided that there was to be no false pride, either on your side or mine. But that is not all, or I need not have brought you here. To be brief, then, you have done me a service, small or great according to the value which a man is disposed to put upon himself; you saved me from being maimed or killed, and I hold myself your debtor to any amount you choose to name."

Was that offer a temptation for the penniless young man, footsore from his weary pilgrimage through the streets, with heart aching over the day's disappointment, and the prospect of its repetition on the morrow? Did he hesitate when he thought of his mother's patient struggles, and the visions of the home poverty rose vividly before him? And did his palm quiver with expectant eagerness for the promised gold as he looked down at his threadbare coat, which told so plainly the history of privation and scanty means? He shrewdly guessed that its shabbiness had more than once turned the balance against him in the favor of some who might have become his employers, if they had not followed the common fashion of measuring a man's merits and capabilities by the texture of his broadcloth. If the tempting offer did gain acceptance for an instant, it was not apparent to the eyes that scrutinized him so closely; they saw only the quivering of the sensitive mouth, the proud kindling of the great brown eyes, and burning color in the face. The old man was prepared for the hurt tone of surprise that answered him.

## CHAPTER X.

### NOT FOR MONEY.

"SIR, am I to understand that you mean to offer me money for what I did to-night?"

"Certainly! my exchequer will afford it, and you have a right to such an acknowledgment."

"No, I have not," said the young man, steadily returning his look; "your thanks give me sufficient acknowledgment, for I did no more than I would do again for the meanest beggar, if I saw him in danger."

"That feeling does you credit, still it is no reason why you should refuse to take what might be a benefit to you and your friends. These are not the days for romantic sentiment to be carried too far; and, excuse me, but I have an idea that your circumstances do not warrant your being indifferent about money."

Again the quivering of the sensitive lips, and a deeper dye of crimson in the hot cheeks; still

the proud young head was held erect, and the voice spoke out without break or tremor.

"You are right, sir, I am poor, perhaps poorer than you think, and I am not indifferent about money; still I can not think of being paid for doing a simple act of humanity: that is not for buying or selling."

"But if I give it you?"

"Then it is like taking alms; and rather than that, I would prefer to—"

"Starve, I suppose you are going to say," struck in the old man, with a cynical smile creeping round his lips.

"No, sir, that is a strong word, for I can not judge what I might do in such an extremity. I meant to say that I would rather work."

"Ah! but with your peculiar ideas it is likely that you would be over-scrupulous about the sort of work you would condescend to do."

"Oh, no—no! there you mistake me," broke in the young man, eagerly and hurriedly; "I would do any thing by which I could fairly earn wages. Six months ago, I might have thought some nonsense about my own abilities, but that has been crushed out of me. My mother struggled hard to have me educated for a higher position. But now I am ready to take the hardest work that my strength will let me do, and begin at the very lowest step of the ladder."

"Indeed. May I ask why?"

"Because I should be always trying to climb up," said the young man, proudly; "and if the chance is once given me, I feel sure that I shall succeed."

"Well, suppose it is in my power to help you to such a chance, would you cast it back as you did my offer of the money?"

He might have read his answer in the eager eyes.

"Oh, sir, if you would only be my friend in that way! I have so often wished that some one would have enough faith to try me. I would—" Here he checked himself, adding, "But this seems like boasting about myself. I only meant to say that I would do my best."

"No one would expect you to do more," replied the listener, gravely,—commenting to himself, "At last I have stumbled upon a singular specimen, quite original, and not to be met at every street-turning." Aloud he said, "In the event of my being able to serve you, I should require to know your name, where you were last employed, and a good deal concerning yourself; and on the other side, you will be entitled to know something about me. Now, whom do you suppose me to be?"

The young man hesitated, as he replied, "The manager of this firm, or—or—perhaps one of the partners."

"Ah! then perhaps you wish me to recommend you to Mr. Crawton?"

The candid eyes clouded, and the reply came falteringly, "Thank you, sir; but I am afraid it would do little good in my case. I know that I should have very little chance of gaining his favor."

The old man gave him a curious look, as he said, "You seem to hold him in dread as a very forbidding personage. How is it?"

"I can not explain all, but I have private reasons for knowing that he is hard and stern, and that I have no chance of his favor."

"We shall see," returned the other, hurriedly. "I have great respect for the head of this house, and I am inclined to think that you wrong him; however, as I said, we shall see. Be here by ten o'clock in the morning. My word will have great weight, and I promise to do my best for you. But I must have your name."

It was given with some hesitation, "Hugh Crawton."

He was not prepared for the effect which it produced. The old man started as if he had received an unexpected blow.

"Eh! what! Hugh Crawton! is your father's name Robert?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it possible! Then you are the son of—"

"Daniel Crawton's only brother," added the young man, hastily. "That is why I said I knew him to be hard and stern. My father offended him many years ago, and he has never forgiven him. We have all felt the effect of his harshness."

"Then I suppose his name is a by-word of bitterness in your house."

"No; my mother is a Christian, and her influence would forbid that."

The old man answered, with a strange twitching about the muscles of his mouth, "So much the better; those enmities are not good to hand down as family legacies. Now I think you may wish me good-night. Come to-morrow morning at the hour named, and we will see what can be done. Now take your hat, and go quietly down, speaking to none as you pass out, and neither asking nor answering questions. You will easily find your way."

Thus they separated. It was not long before the young man was speeding homeward, his heart beating high with alternating hope and fear, while the old man paced the room with a steady, monotonous tramp, which he kept up without cessation, talking excitedly to himself, with his strong, sinewy hands crushed tightly together.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WOMAN'S ENDURANCE.

"My dear, you astonish me! to think that you have actually written to him without informing me!"

So spoke Robert Crawton, with unwonted energy, sitting up on his couch, his eyes bright with excitement, and the feverish, hectic color flushing his hollow cheeks. His wife stood beside him with an open letter in her hand, which she had just been reading aloud. The room had no light except that of the fire, and a soli-

tary mould candle burning on the little work-table. Thus, Mrs. Crawton standing partially in the shadow with her face turned from him, he could not see the pained look that clouded her soft eyes as she answered—

"Robert, is it possible that you mistake my motive in this? Can it be needful for me to say that I withheld the knowledge from you because I could not tell it without revealing the trouble, of which I wished you to know nothing until the worst was passed, as it is now, when the money is paid, and those dreadful men gone away? Robert, you can not realize what agony their presence gave me; I was in such fear of them coming near this room, or that something might arise to betray the truth to you."

He answered with a deprecating movement of the white, helpless hands, which had accomplished so little for himself or others.

"I knew we must be getting miserably poor, but I never dreamed it would come to this, that we could sink so low; sheriff's officers here in the house, actually in possession, and me to suspect nothing of what was going on!"

"Was it not better for you to be so spared, dear Robert," replied the gentle comforter, passing her hand caressingly over his thin light hair, plentifully sprinkled with gray; "better to remain in happy ignorance of that new trouble? Judging your feelings by my own, I knew how it would pain you, and that made me anxious to keep it secret until I could tell it as trouble that was past."

"Yes, my dear, I know that you meant it kindly, and that it was all done for the best; still it seems sometimes like putting me aside, and—and in this matter of the letter, I think I had a right to be told that you intended writing to Daniel for assistance. It has turned out that you did a wise thing, but I should like to have known beforehand. Did you keep a copy of the letter sent to him?"

"I did," was the low-spoken answer, accompanied by a stifled sigh, which he did not hear, and a rush of silent tears that welled up slowly into the large tender eyes, but were not suffered to fall; while he, absorbed in his narrower world of self, and chained down to its lower range of thoughts and feelings, with all the sordid earthly littlenesses clinging to him, could not rise to the higher level of that nobler nature, nor comprehend the finer qualities which raised her so far above him. Loving her as he did, in his own way, and holding her value above all others, he had never rightly understood nor measured the real worth of the devoted wife who had been the one guiding star of his life, clinging to him through all his reverses, and finding always such a generous shield for his weaknesses and moral infirmities, believing in him, as only a loving woman would, and day by day paying out the wealth of her rich heart in unnumbered self-sacrifices, which he had learnt to accept as his right.

That little scene chronicled one of the saddest phases of her wifely experience, and shadowed

out the trial harder to bear than her poverty, which had helped to bind on her fair matron brow the crown of sorrow which she wore so meekly. And he went on, passively submitting to be nursed and cared for, making his petty exactions, unconscious that he was guilty of any injustice, and never dreaming how often his words had cut into her heart like pointed arrows.

Again the thin, querulous voice took up the thread of half-implied reproach.

"I am glad you thought of doing that, my dear, for it shows I was a little considered, not that I ever complain of any intentional neglect or slight from you; still it is better than if you had quite ignored my wishes on the subject. Knowing my brother's temper as I do, it was natural that I should want to hear how you had managed the delicate negotiation. It was not a pleasant task for you to undertake. I never liked the idea of asking favors from Daniel, his manner was always so crushing. In all my difficulties I have only applied to him twice for money, and then you may remember I was sorely driven; well, it was granted me in such a repelling way that I said I would never ask again. Did you write the letter in my name?"

"Yes."

"But of course he would know the handwriting was yours; that was why the answer came so quickly, and whatever there is civil in the letter is meant for you, not me."

"Robert!"

There was a world of expression in that single word, wounded dignity and sorrowful reproach, as she laid her hand on his arm, and looked into his face with her true, steadfast eyes. His gaze fell before hers, and he put up his hands, as if in protest against what he guessed she was about to say. Through life he had always cherished his own sensitive nerves, and done his best to shirk the doing of unpleasant tasks, and the hearing of unpleasant things as regarded himself.

"Don't—don't! if you love me, Mary! I never can bear that look in your eyes, it is worse than if you got downright angry, and loaded me with reproaches; if my words have hurt you, put it down to my blundering. think it a mistake—any thing, except that I meant to be unjust to you."

She answered, with her hand still upon his arm, "Your words did hurt me, Robert, for they seemed to imply doubt, cruel doubt, of me and my motives, and they brought with them a shadow that should never come between you and me."

"I could not help it, Mary; you know he loved you in the old time—loved you as he never loved another woman before or since. Remembering that, and thinking what would be your position now, if you had been his wife instead of mine, I find myself wondering if you do not sometimes regret your choice; and then perhaps I am a little jealous."

"Jealous!" She repeated the word, holding up her fair, matronly head, with a flush of height-

ened color in her pale face. "That is unworthy of yourself; your brother, whom you know to be a man of high honor, in spite of his peculiarities; and most unjust to me, the mother of your children, and your wife of twenty-five years. Tell me if you can remember any thing in my life that gives color to these doubts—if you have not always found me faithful to you and yours. I could go on enduring, through all my days, coldness, neglect, hard words—any thing except distrust; where I am loved, I must be trusted and believed in."

She was unusually agitated, and betrayed it in her look and tone. It was not often that quiet, undemonstrative nature revealed so much of its inner depths, nor allowed its strong currents of feeling to be so deeply moved upon the surface. The invalid suffered himself to sink back to his usual reclining position, pressing his hand on his side, and apparently breathing with difficulty, as he wailed out his fretful remonstrance with the injured look and tone which he always used, when he pitied himself as a domestic martyr, and cast himself on his physical weakness as a ground of exemption from the common duties and obligations that were binding upon people in the enjoyment of health and other advantages which he had not.

"My dear, this talk of yours is doing me more harm than I can tell; you know I am not strong enough to bear this kind of excitement, it always brings the dreadful ache in my side; but I have no right to complain. What matter if it does hasten the end? it will relieve you of a burden; for I know that I am now a clog upon you all."

It was a characteristic speech, full of the egotism which had perhaps been fostered in him by the devotion which ministered so constantly to his wants. Mrs. Crawton's face did not change. She stooped down, made his cushions comfortable, and softly wiped the damp from his forehead as she spoke. None would have guessed from her quiet manner how sorely he had wounded her.

"Robert, I can not answer words like those. Let them remain as they have been spoken, if you can not find their contradiction in mine and your children's lives, so far as we are associated with you."

He looked at her anxiously, her hand was still fluttering about him with its gentle touches. He clasped it with his wasted fingers, and stroked her hair in a childish conciliating way, saying—

"Forgive me, Mary, something seems to be dividing us to-night; perhaps it is my own fault. I always say the wrong things at the wrong times. Daniel used to tell me that I was miserably short of tact; but forget it all now, and kiss me, dear wife."

That was his way, to cast random arrows, then seek to disarm them of their sting. He might have known that wounds are more easily made than healed.

She said nothing, only left her hand passively in his, and kissed him.

At that moment the door-bell rang, and presently the voice of Hugh was heard in the passage. Then Mrs. Cawton quietly released herself, saying, "There is Hugh. Before he comes in here, I must read you the copy of my letter to your brother. I have it ready."

"Not to-night, Mary," he replied, hastily. "I am satisfied, and I don't think that I care about seeing the letter, after all."

While this scene was passing beside her father's sofa, Margaret, who had just said "good-night" to Charles Marston, stole quietly back to the room where they had held their long tête-à-tête that evening, and sinking into the chair which she had quitted not many minutes before, gave herself up to a train of sorrowful thoughts.

"His pictures—always about his pictures, and the success he hopes to win. I fancied to-night that he was almost ready to reproach me for my apparent want of sympathy and enthusiasm. What means this heartache? Dear Nelly would call it want of trust; but I can not help it—the fear that something will divide us, as the broader light falls upon his way. Does Charles really love me as he says, or is he only deceiving himself and me? Fame, fortune, a painter's ambition—does he hold me first or second to these? Time will prove. But I can not hide it any longer from myself. I love him dearer—dearer than life."

So thinking, with her brow bent wearily on her hand, and her work lying unheeded on the table—an unwonted state of things for busy Margaret—Chriss found her when she came in with coals for the fire, which was fast dying out for want of attention. The old servant lingered to brush up the hearth, watching Margaret with a pucker of anxiety on her rugged face. She was longing to ask what ailed her, but somehow Miss Margaret was not like her mother; she had a way that put people at a distance. And she knew just as well as if she had been told that it was something wrong with Mr. Charles, perhaps a quarrel. "That came of girls worriting their heads about young men. If Miss Margaret had only taken warning by her own mother, who had never known any thing but trouble since she let that bit of gold be put round her finger. But there, it was no use; daughters would go on falling in love and getting married, in spite of any thing their mothers could tell them."

This concluded her cogitations, and with a sigh over its utter hopelessness, Chriss gave up the subject.

There was another besides Margaret Cawton who had troubled musings that night. Charles Marston, the artist, in his bachelor sitting-room, stood leaning his elbow on the low mantel-shelf, with a moody contraction of his broad brow, and a pained expression in his eyes that Margaret would have been sorry to see.

"I can not think what has come over Marga-

ret," he murmured. "Something told me that she was not herself to-night. She seemed thoughtful and sad, and did not enter into my plans with her usual spirit. Then she talked some nonsense about their poverty, and the change in our positions. Can it be that she doubts me? No, I will not wrong her by that thought. Yet, oh, Margaret! if there is a shadow on your heart, why not show it to me? A woman's instinct should tell you, without any words of mine, that the one dream of my life, the first aim of my ambition, is to make a fit home for you. I don't believe in any man rushing blindly into marriage, without provision for the future. If he truly loves a woman, let him put his shoulder to the wheel, that the path which she is to tread with him may be as smooth as he can make it."

At this point the artist took pencil and paper, and sketched.

Thus were two young people who had given heart for heart, unconsciously surrounding themselves with shadows, which a few frank words from each would have dispelled; troubled with doubts and fears which grew out of their very love, and standing almost on the verge of what might become a painful misunderstanding of each other.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE UNACKNOWLEDGED WIFE.

MARK DANSON watched the opening door with a look of keen anxiety. Another moment, and he would be face to face with the one whose love for him had condemned her to a life of painful self-sacrifice, and whom he was daily wronging by his cowardly injustice. But, woman-like, in the first moment of meeting, Eleanor forgot the bitter estrangement that was dividing them, forgot all he had made her suffer; and the angry things which she had meant to say remained unspoken in the sudden rush of tenderness, which only wanted some little response from him to be ready in loving forgiveness to bridge the gulf which he had put between them. But that response did not come. He met her in a cool, supercilious manner that gave her a cruel check, and the first sound of his voice fell upon her heart with a disappointing chill—her heart that was even then hungering for some little word or look of returning tenderness—the recall of affection which she had lost by no fault of hers. If beauty could have won the recreant back, the young wife would have succeeded that night, for she was looking her best. Eleanor always dressed with care and taste, but in anticipation of his coming she had made all the little tasteful additions which she knew she liked. The dark violet dress was one which he had been used to admire, and the beautiful hair was arranged in his favorite style, brushed back from the fair face, and knotted over a pearl comb, with two long, bright curls



left to fall over her shoulders, where they looked like woven sunbeams.

He examined her with a coldly speculative air, while she stood flushing and trembling under his gaze, her large eyes taking a look of sad reproach as they met his. He extended his hand, and took hers, limply and indifferently,

added, "Of course you received the message which I sent by your father?"

"I did," she faltered, with a sudden choking sensation in her throat.

"I wish you would sit down, Eleanor; you look so uncomfortable standing there."

As he spoke he carelessly pushed towards



The old servant lingered to brush up the hearth.

as he would that of a stranger, and just suffering the tips of her fingers to touch his for an instant, said, in a tone that matched his manner—

"How are you this evening, Eleanor?" and, without waiting for an answer to his inquiry,

her a chair, placing it at some paces from the couch—a hint that he did not wish her to come nearer. She took it almost mechanically, and waited for him to speak, for the moment utterly crushed by her disappointment, and stung to the quick by his callous indifference, which

reopened all the wounds which his heartless neglect had given her.

"Well, Eleanor," he began, lightly, "I am here according to promise. Have you nothing to say to me, or am I to understand that you have exhausted it all in those precious sermonizing epistles, which it has lately pleased you to lavish upon my unworthy self?"

Something in his tone roused her, and gave the reaction which she needed to steady her nerves and steel her sensibilities through that trying interview.

"This levity is ill-timed, Mark, and the subject one which you, at least, should not have chosen."

"Pugh! Eleanor, you have such a turn for sentimentalizing. I was provoked to it by your serious face. No wonder that I avoid coming here. I always prepare myself for a scene. The truth is, you are sadly changed from the girl that I first knew."

It was a cruel cut, and she felt it keenly. Her lips whitened and trembled as she said, "Who is to blame for that, Mark Danson?"

"Your own moping temper is to blame, I suppose."

She went on, apparently not noticing his remark, "You, and you only, Mark. If we had never met, and I could strike out from my life the last two years of mental misery, then I might hope to have back my old light heart and the peace of mind which you have helped to destroy."

"Ever harping on the old theme of reproach. I am making discoveries about you, Eleanor, and not very pleasant ones; for I find that your temper is soured. But never mind," he added, hastily checking her as she was about to speak, "I know what you are going to say, that it is my fault, and all the rest—talk that does no good to either of us. Women are so confoundedly perverse, even to their own injury; and you are no exception to the rule," he continued, bitterly. "Why could you not be reasonable, and keep our secret from your father, until the proper time came for it to be told?"

"When would that time come, Mark?" she asked, with a direct, steady look into his eyes. "You put me off so long, no wonder that my heart grew sick with waiting; and I felt that I could no longer rest under my father's roof, and keep that secret hidden from him. But even now I feel my daily life a falsehood before the world. Oh, Mark! it was cruel to lay such a burden on the shoulders of a weak woman—a girl, for I was no more when you knew me first."

There was a break in her voice as she spoke the last words, and a trembling movement of her slight, white hands told how deeply she was agitated. But she kept her steadfast gaze fixed upon him, until his cold, light eyes fell before hers, and his manner betrayed something of uneasiness as he said, with an attempt at soothing—

"Come, Eleanor, it is such folly to be work-

ing yourself into a fit of excitement that will avail nothing, and make things neither better nor worse. You know that the reasons which made concealment necessary still exist; then why not be patient and wait the issue of events?"

"Patient," she interjected wearily; "have I not been patient, bearing the same dull heart-ache from day to day?"

"Well, yes, I grant that you have; but where is the use of spoiling every thing by acting rash and desperate all at once? Do be reasonable, Eleanor, and try to let us have a little cheerful talk, as a set-off against this dismal beginning of our interview."

Ever the same—selfish and heartless. How lightly he could thrust aside the burden of sorrow which troubled him not! Another revelation of the nature of the man with whom she had, unhappily, linked her fate. Poor young wife, it had been such a sad awakening from her girlish love-dream.

"By-the-by, Eleanor," said Mark, suddenly, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "there is something I want to ask you; if I am not mistaken, you have some sort of acquaintance with the family of my Uncle Robert."

"I know Margaret Crawton; she is the dearest friend that I have in the world."

"Ah! indeed; do you often see her?"

"Not so often as I wish."

His lip curled slightly. "Upon my word, Eleanor, I am inclined to think that you have a large spice of romance in you. Well, perhaps you can tell me something about the family. I believe them to be wretchedly poor, and no wonder; Uncle Robert was always shiftless and improvident, prospering in nothing that he undertook, and his son can be little better, or he would not stay idling at home, a burden, when he ought to be out earning his bread."

"Stop, Mark," said Eleanor, her cheek flushing; "I know little of Hugh Crawton, but I feel sure that you wrong him. He is too much like his sister to be idle, if he could get work to do."

Mark shrugged his shoulders.

"So my cousin has found a defender in you, Eleanor. Well, perhaps I may be a little prejudiced—the natural result of circumstances. You know there is a division in our family. It began in the quarrel of two brothers, which time has not yet healed—and I trust never will." This was added in an aside, not intended for Eleanor's ears. He continued with a touch of haughtiness, "I was never allowed to be intimate with that branch of the Crawtons. They sank to a lower level, drifted into an inferior position, and I am Uncle Daniel's adopted son and heir."

"For what purpose do you make these inquiries about them, Mark?" asked Eleanor, with some vague suspicion which she could not define.

He hesitated a moment and looked at her closely, as he replied, "I will take you into



confidence, Eleanor. I know that my prospects will be secure enough when the old governor dies, still an absurd fancy has taken possession of me that some day, perhaps, young Hugh Crawton may try to stand in my way. Nelly, you can do me a service; make the most of your intimacy with the girl Margaret, worm into her confidence, get her to talk about her brother—his character, temper, and habits; also his exact position and views for the future. You can do it without exciting suspicion about your motives."

He stood up and tried to take her hand, but to his surprise it was drawn back.

"Mark Danson, do you really wish me to act this part of treachery to a friend?"

"Treachery! what do you mean? Is it, as usual, that you are going to entertain me with one of your favorite homilies? But, seriously, you will not refuse me, Eleanor?"

She answered, with a quiet resolution for which he was not prepared, "Yes, I do refuse; Margaret Crawton is my friend. I feel that it is with no good or kindly motive that you seek this information about her brother, and women should never be traitors to each other."

Here he managed to get possession of her hand, grasping it and looking her steadily in the face as he said, "What if I make this little favor the price of my concession to your wishes, in a matter very nearly concerning yourself?"

She started and turned pale, gasping, "You mean the acknowledgment of our marriage?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Mark! you can not be cruel enough to hold that threat over me."

He smiled and showed his white teeth.

"You have yet to learn what I can do. But the matter stands thus, Eleanor: if you will not oblige me in this trifle, I shall be in no hurry to risk the loss of my uncle's favor by letting him know that I was weak fool enough to marry the daughter of his clerk, knowing as I do that he has other views for me."

"But you are my husband, Mark; you will be compelled to do me justice, and give me your name, which is mine to claim before the world."

"Indeed; pray what will compel me?"

"The law, which protects the rights of the weak and helpless."

"The law!" he repeated, with a mocking echo and a low, scornful laugh. "I warn you, Eleanor, for your own sake, be careful how you deal with me."

watch the issue of events with much anxiety, for I am deeply interested in the success of your benevolent experiment."

"Experiment! pray what do you mean, Mark?" interrogated Daniel Crawton, with a contraction of his rugged brows, and wheeling his chair sharply round that he might face his nephew.

The smooth face bore the scrutiny as it always did in that presence, where Mark Danson was ever on the defensive, fully armed and prepared against surprise; for he never lost sight of the fact that his worldly prospects were in the hands of the cross-grained old man, whom he had made it the study of his life to please at any price. He smiled in his deprecating way, and said, quietly, "I was alluding to our new clerk."

"Well, what of him?"

"Simply this, uncle, that as you have thought proper to receive him here, it is natural for me to be anxious that he should not prove unworthy, and disappoint the hopes you have formed in his favor."

"Indeed; how do you know that I have formed such hopes?"

This query was put in a certain dry, rasping tone that was nothing new to Mark.

He answered, with perfect self-possession, "I guess it from the fact of your giving him a position of trust. I will not say that I was not taken by surprise, as it was rather stepping aside from your usual caution—not that I wish to say any thing disparaging of Cousin Hugh."

Here the keen gray eyes fixed his in a steady look, and his uncle said, sternly, "Mark, by this time you should know me too well to make the mistake of presuming on your privileges. Understand, that in this matter I acted entirely on my own responsibility, without reference to its effect on any second person. With regard to Hugh Crawton, I did no more for him than I would for any young man of average abilities, who could produce satisfactory credentials of character and competency."

Mark listened respectfully. He had been playing with a flower which he had taken from the button-hole of his coat. As his uncle finished speaking, his long white fingers closed over the fair fragile petals and crushed them—deliberate, remorseless, as he would at that moment have crushed any thing that crossed him, if it were only in his power. He spoke in his usual calm voice, without the slightest ruffle of agitation on the surface, though the passionate heat was at its fiercest, under the smooth, colorless mask that betrayed nothing, and his heart was growing sick with jealous hate and apprehension of this favored Hugh Crawton, whom he had always dreaded as a possible rival in his uncle's favor.

"I agree with your views, uncle, and I shall rejoice in any good fortune that may fall to the lot of my cousin; still I can not help feeling some distrust of Hugh Crawton. It may wear away with time, when I come to know him bet-

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE NEW CLERK.

"VERY good, uncle, all shall be done according to your wishes: for in this, as in other things, I am willing to submit to your better judgment. For the rest, I can only hope that time may confirm your favorable impressions. But you can not blame me for saying that I shall

ter; I hope it may. But at present my mind is full of the unhappy quarrel with which he is linked, and the sight of him seems associated with all that is most unpleasant to remember in our family history; for I can not forget that he is Robert Cawton's son, and may possibly inherit his father's faults."

The last words marred the effect of the cunning speech. A quick, imperative gesture from the old merchant, and a reproving flash from his eyes, warned Mark that he had mistaken his ground.

"Enough of this subject, Mark Danson; and from this time never let any thing mislead you into the same error. Whenever you have occasion to speak of Robert Cawton, bear in mind that he is your mother's brother and mine. Whatever his faults, it is not for you to sit in judgment over them. And with regard to what you call our 'unhappy quarrel,' I warn you to dismiss it from your mind, for I will have no meddling with what concerns only me and mine."

Wily Mark was dismayed at the unlooked-for reproof which he had drawn upon himself. It seemed to give a new color to the events of the past week, introducing an unexpected feature into his own position with regard to the new clerk. He made a mental note of all he had heard, adding his own comment: "The sneaking reptile has managed to get one step on the ladder that he thinks to climb; but he shall be struck down, if there is any force in my will, or power in my arm. That is the only way to deal with noxious things that will not keep out of one's way." Aloud he said, in his quietly deferential manner, "Uncle, this is not the first instance in which my over-zeal and solicitude have been mistaken for officiousness. If I have now unwittingly displeased, I trust it will be excused for the sake of my motive: and I wish also to add that nothing will give me more pleasure than to do my best for the interest of the new clerk, if it were only for the sake of his name, for I shall always remember that he is a Cawton."

The old merchant had risen from his seat, and, somewhat uncivilly turning his back on the young man, stood before his writing-desk, pen in hand, sorting a bundle of papers. He faced round as his nephew ceased speaking.

"Words, words, Mark; you may mean well, but it would please me better if you were more sparing with your professions. And now let me set you right with regard to Hugh Cawton and his position here. He did me a service, and I wish to mark my sense of it, so I gave him the situation, as I would have given it to another under similar circumstances; but understand, he takes his place in our counting-house merely as an ordinary clerk, subject to the same rules as the rest. The name of Cawton, and the fact of his relationship to me, will avail him nothing, and more likely may prove a disadvantage, as it might cause him to be more rigidly watched. He will owe nothing to favor,

and have no friend but his own good conduct. I have done my best to impress this upon him, and I mistake him altogether if he would wish to stand on any other ground. That is my idea of helping a young fellow who has his bread to win. Give him a fair start in life, but leave him to put his shoulder to the wheel, and plough up the furrows for himself. If he has the genuine stuff he will be sure to show it, and make his way. I have faith in that test for giving the true ring of the metal."

"And I also, uncle. I hope it will work successfully with Hugh Cawton."

No pleased look of response brightened the grim, granite face of the old merchant; he simply said, "That is for time to prove. In the mean time, don't think that I wish to check your good intentions towards the new clerk. I say nothing against your being friends, provided you have both the good sense to remember your relative positions. But I warn you, once for all, he must not be misled into any false expectations about his advancement here; and on your side, there must be no patronage. It might make one a tyrant, the other a hypocrite; and it is especially hurtful to the man on the lower level, for it has a tendency to make him mean in his own eyes, and take the healthy pluck out of him as effectually as I could crush the life out of a fly."

Mark assented by his silence, but he covertly watched his uncle as he turned again to his desk and busied himself with his papers. Their talk was not resumed. A few minutes later, Mark left the private office, and passed slowly through the counting-house, his glance instantly singling out the new clerk, who occupied the desk next to Giles Royton. He saw a tall young man casting up figures, bending over his sheets with a bright, eager look, as if he were thoroughly in earnest about what he was doing, and had made up his mind to attend to nothing but the work in hand. It was a handsome, vigorous face, crowned with curly brown hair, such as a mother's hand would love to part, in glossy rings, over his broad forehead, and the fearless, frank eyes might be trusted to win their way to any maiden's heart. Mark Danson noted all with the bitter pain that only jealous natures can know. How relentlessly he could have swept aside this new and unexpected impediment in his way. He felt that their rivalry had begun, and from that day would go on the vindictive, masked warfare, which he had vowed should cease only with the ruin of his enemy, for in that light he already regarded the unconscious Hugh Cawton.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MERCHANT'S WARD.

It really is provoking, Aunt Lyd, and I forewarn you that I shall be disagreeable for the rest of the day. Here is a letter of invitation,

or rather I should say a summons, from my respected guardian, for you and me to attend one of those dreary state dinners which I dislike so cordially. But come, auntie, read for yourself."

Here the speaker, a light-footed, bright-faced creature of not twenty years, who had just danced into the room with an open letter in her hand, tossed it on her aunt's knee with a gleeful, girlish laugh, thereby causing serious confusion to an elaborate piece of netting on which the elder lady was engaged. She dropped her eyes in prettily affected dismay at the damage she had done, and, by way of repairing it, managed to get her little fingers hopelessly entangled in the intricate web of threads. At this point the sorely-tried patience of Miss Lydia gave way. She was a tall lady, of uncertain age and painfully slender proportions. Dressed in the height of the fashion that prevailed in her own youth, she looked as though she had just stepped out of some ancient picture-gallery. One of her peculiarities was a profound veneration for every thing old, which the zealous efforts of her niece could not always restrain from bordering on the ludicrous. She raised her hands, encased in antique lace mittens, and with a gesture of impatience pushed aside the blundering little fingers. It was as great a show of severity as she could use to the being whose bright young presence filled the aching void which would otherwise have been in her dull, colorless life.

"May Rivers, how can you rush about in this dreadful, ungovernable way? You are worse than your mother was at your age, and she wanted a good deal of toning down when she was silly enough to marry, and go out to India; poor girl! she had just the same high spirit."

A sigh followed the reminiscence, and the mittened hands seemed to make matters worse with the tangled netting.

"Forgive me, auntie, I will pat myself on regulation manners, creep about like a mouse for the rest of the day, and do any thing else by way of reparation, even to the extent of voting myself an encumbrance. Why don't you accuse me to my guardian, and get him to relieve you from such a torment?"

Aunt Lydia was afflicted with a slight deafness, so part of this speech was lost upon her; but she caught the drift of the last words, which was enough. Her work dropped at her feet, and she took off her spectacles, replacing them the next moment, but inverting them, which was rather trying to May Rivers, who had a quick eye for comic effects; at another time she would have seized it at once.

"May—May! that was not like your mother, for she never hurt with her tongue; but you will never learn better till I am dead, child."

The answer was a pair of arms thrown fondly round her neck, and the touch of warm lips raining kisses on her withered cheek, as May sobbed out, "Oh, Aunt Lydia, I meant nothing but fun!"

The spinster came out of the embrace with

the lace of her cap crumpled, and the folds of her stiff silk considerably crushed. Even at home Aunt Lydia liked state toilettes.

The youthful niece stood beside her chair with the air of a chidden child. There could be no doubt that the demonstration was a genuine burst of feeling; her curved red lips had a grieved childish quiver, as she repeated, "Oh, aunt, I don't want you to think that I meant to be unkind!"

To which Miss Lydia responded very readily; she was completely overcome by the girl's earnestness, and her irritability passed quickly, as it always did when her niece was the transgressor. When she did find occasion to entrench herself in her dignity, she could never remain long upon her pedestal, as May Rivers knew. For in spite of the old lady's occasional querulousness, and the old-fashioned peculiarities which May was often disposed to protest against, none knew better than herself the real worth of Aunt Lydia, who had done her best to fill the dead mother's place, from the time that she had first given her loving welcome to the poor little exotic from India, through all the tender, helpless years when she had watched its growth until now, when it had struck its roots so firmly in her heart.

May felt it all very forcibly, and her great brown eyes grew misty with tears as she leaned her elbow on the stiff-backed leather chair, and tried to create a diversion by returning to the subject of her guardian's letter—the invitation and the impending visit. It was about three months since she had taken her final leave of the fashionable finishing establishment, where the will of her obstinate guardian had compelled her to remain a full half year's term, after she had given her opinion that her education ought to be completed. This kind of opposition was nothing new in their experience. There had often been little clashes in their wills, which had led the guardian to predict that his ward would cause him endless trouble and anxiety in the future.

May Rivers was not a beauty, in the general translation of the word. Her figure was under the middle stature, and it is doubtful that feminine critics would not even have voted her good-looking at first sight. The chief charm of her dark, brilliant face, was the power of expression. It was the kind of attractiveness that grows into our admiration almost insensibly, dawning upon us in unexpected revelations like the subtle touches of a picture studied in new lights.

May was the orphan daughter of an officer who had lived and died in the Indian service. While visiting England on leave of absence, when he was a widower, with one little boy, he had met and loved May Spencer, the beautiful young sister of Miss Lydia. They married, after an acquaintance of some months, and he carried away his bride in triumph to her new home in the far-off land, where he would surround her with all that wealth could give.

Little May, the only child of this second mar-

riage, had to mourn the loss of both parents before she was ten years old. In fulfillment of her dead father's wish, she was sent to England, under the care of a devoted colored nurse, there to become the cherished charge of Aunt Lydia, who had never quite forgiven her sister's marriage, which she regarded as a personal injury to herself.

The deceased officer had left his young daughter and her large fortune to the sole guardianship of his old friend, Daniel Cawton.

The choice was a wise one; for, in spite of his own iron will and inflexible sternness of character, the old merchant was one of those who would hold a trust sacred as life.

There was a pause, during which the elder lady occupied herself trying to repair the damage to her work, while May stood dutifully behind her chair looking on, and thinking, with her chin resting on her hand. Then, with one of those quick changes of humor which often overtook her happiest moods, her bright face overshadowed like the sudden clouding of a summer sky, and her voice had a strange tone of sadness, as she said, abruptly—

"Aunt, I am going to make a confession—there are times when I regret that I was left to be papa's heiress."

The dignified spinster looked up in surprise.

May continued, "Yes, aunt, regret, for this large fortune and all the responsibilities which it will bring with it. I would rather be an insignificant nobody, with just money enough for my wants, and free to do as I pleased, without having a cross old guardian to trouble himself about my movements."

"Hush, May! that sounds like ingratitude for the blessings which are yours."

"It may be, aunt; I stand corrected before you; still I can not help wishing I had some big, strong brother to represent the family and take the property, which would be his by inheritance; and then I find myself brooding over that strange episode in our family history, which has seemed to me always a forbidden subject that every body shunned; even my old Indian nurse dislikes to answer any questions about it."

"You mean the loss of your half-brother," said Aunt Lydia, dropping her voice.

"I do," continued May, dreamily. "How strange that no clue has ever been found to that mystery!"

"Yes, child, strange and sad in its results; for it threw a shadow over the last years of your mother's life. There are always uncharitable meddlers, ready to sow the seeds of mischief with their tongues. Some of their senseless whispers got round to her ears, poor thing, and fretted her sorely. At best, it is a thankless office to be a stepmother. They hinted that the missing boy not being her son, his loss would be lightly got over; particularly as it made such a difference to her own child's prospects."

"What!" cried May, her eyes kindling, and her cheeks in a flame, "could they be base

enough to suspect my darling mother as an accomplice?"

"Hush, May!" interrupted Aunt Lydia, in visible agitation. "I had no business to talk about these things; let us leave them in the darkness where they have been hidden so long. Your mother is at rest, and those whose good opinion she valued most never doubted her; for they knew her to be good and true. Now, child, go up and change your dress, you are looking so untidy, and this fine morning is likely to bring us visitors."

But May was not satisfied; Aunt Lydia's remarks had troubled her, and she left the room resolving to put her old nurse through a rigorous cross-examination on the subject which seemed so shrouded in mystery.

## CHAPTER XV.

### COUSIN MARK'S FRIENDSHIP.

It was some weeks after Hugh had carried home the news of his unexpected good fortune, which seemed like the dawning of a brighter day for the struggling family, and gave unwonted happiness to the hopeful little circle that closed round the fire on the memorable evening of his first day as clerk in Daniel Cawton's counting-house. The poor mother wept grateful tears over her son, and felt it a reward for all her cares and anxieties when she listened to his account of the interview between himself and the eccentric old merchant to whom he had been so strangely introduced. Then followed the wonderful discovery of his identity with that dreaded Uncle Dan, who had always been a formidable personage in the family annals. It was like a visible answer to many yearning prayers for her boy's future. What good results might not grow out of the daily association with his uncle! It might, under Providence, be permitted to bring about a reconciliation between the brothers, and remove the unnatural estrangement which had cost her many a heartache. It remained for the unknown future to prove whether any of these new-born hopes would ever be realized.

Mark Danson stood leaning over a desk, chatting familiarly with Hugh Cawton, into whose good opinion he seemed to be rapidly insinuating himself: the cousins were becoming fast friends. For some reason, known only to himself, the junior partner had remained that evening long after his usual hour for departure. All the clerks were gone, except Hugh and Giles Royton, whose duty was to see to the locking of the office doors. Work had been finished some time, and he now sat idly on his stool, waiting for the young master to go. He had taken his hat from its peg, and kept his hands busy smoothing round the rusty beaver with a sort of melancholy persistence, as though he had some forlorn hope of restoring the departed polish of its early days. Giles Royton was known

as one of the shabbiest-looking clerks in the office. A long time he waited, watching the two young men, until their figures seemed to blend together in a dull haze, and listening to the hum of their voices with a kind of passive curiosity about the subject of their talk, and vague wonder at Mark Danson's prolonged stay, but at the same time resolutely striving to thrust aside all thoughts which did not belong to the ever-present bitterness that filled his heart; for his daughter's wrongs lay darkly there. Even as he watched, his eyes took an altered expression, and the leaden dependency of his dull, gray face flamed up with sudden passion, as he muttered between his teeth, "How long does he think we can keep on bearing this, Nelly and I? If he could only be forced to do her justice! But patience; he must be brought down with his own weapons. We must match him with craft for craft, and wile for wile. If these fail and the worst comes, she can but throw herself on the mercy of the old governor, and let him know what a precious villain he has got for a nephew."

Mark Danson was becoming very friendly and confidential, suspiciously so, if Hugh Cawton had but known the true nature of the man. Was there no saving instinct to put him on the defensive, and make him take the alarm in time? Mark seemed to glide quite naturally into the familiar appellation of Cousin Hugh; and with a free-and-easy frankness of manner, as though he took it for granted that they thoroughly understood each other from that time, he ventured to lay his hand on Hugh's arm, to give greater impressiveness to what he was saying.

"I already foresee that your coming here will be a boon to me—that is, if you will let me be your friend, and not disdain to take a helping hand from me, whenever the chance occurs. I have few home ties. Uncle Dan and I live together in comparative seclusion, in a rambling old house, almost big enough to lodge a respectable sized village—a seclusion that has been rather hard on me at times, and made me regret the family disunion that kept me apart from the rest of my relations. But I trust it is not too late to bridge the chasm that has so long divided us. I shall begin by begging you to let me pay an early visit to your house, that I may make up for lost time with my aunt and uncle; and, if I am not mistaken, you have a sister, Mary, or—"

"Margaret," corrected Hugh, somewhat taken by surprise at this excess of cordiality.

"Ah, yes; just so. I shall be very glad to know my Cousin Margaret. Then it is a mutual compact between us; from this time we are friends, and it will be my privilege to pull you through any difficulties that may arise in your situation."

"Thank you," said Hugh, a little reservedly, unable to get rid of the feeling that there was something rather overwhelming in the friendship thus suddenly thrust upon him. "I have always preferred to depend more on my-

self than others. Still I am not insensible to your kindness, though I trust there will not be the need to make it available, for I own I am not fond of receiving favors."

"Independent and self-confident; makes quite sure of opening his oyster. I shall have tough work here." This was the language of Mark Danson's thoughts; that of his lips was somewhat different. "Right, Hugh; this is what I might have expected; a spark of the Cawton pride;—well, all that can be easily understood. But now, with regard to the respected head of our firm. You know what Daniel Cawton is, better, perhaps, than I can tell you. I only say that he is queer, and carries his queerness into every thing with which he has to do. A hard taskmaster, and hard to please, as you will find, before you have been here six months. What I want to say is, that if you are ever in a fog with regard to him, drop me a hint, and I will help you through. But, first, tell me what tactics have you made up your mind to go upon."

This question puzzled Hugh. He answered, firmly, "I have made up my mind to do my duty to the utmost of my power, striving in all things to keep true to myself and faithful to the master I serve. That, in my opinion, comprises all the tactics necessary. I dislike the word, and object to its application here."

Mark's only answer was a shrug of the shoulders and a half-compassionate smile. If he had dared, he would have openly sneered at the sentiment; for, in spite of the fair-seeming morality that lay like surface-varnish on his outward life, there was far down in his heart a deep-seated, dreary skepticism concerning all that was good and true in human nature. He turned away his head, possibly because he could not trust the expression of his face to be seen by his companion just then. But Giles Royton, chancing to look that way, caught the feline gleam in his eyes, and it startled him out of his own moody abstraction to wonder what new villainy might be in his thoughts.

After a few minutes, the cousins said good-night and separated, Mark wringing from the young clerk a half-reluctant promise to seek an early opportunity of introducing him to his home.

Left alone with Mr. Danson, Giles Royton would have lingered and tried to turn the opportunity to account, by renewing a former conversation about his daughter. But Mark had his own reasons for avoiding a tête-à-tête with Eleanor's father, and managed to avert it by stooping to conciliate; making him the bearer of a note to Eleanor, which he hastily scribbled in pencil. It was evidently dictated by the exigencies of the moment.

"You can leave at once, Royton; it is no use wasting your evening by waiting here. I have business that will detain me some time. But you can lock up as usual, and leave the rest to me. I will use my own key, and let myself out by the private door."

The man did his bidding, but with a dogged

manner, and a half-mutinous look in his eyes, that threatened every moment to break down the restraint of respect which it was his habit to yield to Daniel Crawton's nephew and junior partner. What was the impulse that made him come creeping back, a full half hour after Mark Danson believed himself alone? And, peering suspiciously through the cautiously opened door of the counting-house, what did he see? The gas over Hugh Crawton's desk flaring wildly, and casting a lurid light on the pale, bending face: for there was Mark Danson, stooping over an open ledger, pen in hand, going laboriously over columns of figures, examining invoices, and patiently studying the entries which the new clerk had made that day. For what purpose was he there—a keen, eager-eyed student, too much preoccupied to notice any thing beyond that desk? If he had chanced to turn round at that moment, the intruder would have been ready with a story about something he had forgotten. But he was safe for that time, free to steal away undetected, and grope his way back stealthily as he had come. Giles Royton went home that night brooding over what he had seen, with a suspicion in his mind that would be ready to take form and color, just as the tide of events might chance to turn.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SEEKING.

It was past midnight, and the streets were almost deserted, except for a few dissipated looking cabs, which now and then diversified the scene, and an occasional pedestrian, whom choice or necessity detained out of doors.

Of this last number was a tall, gaunt-looking man, who was slowly threading his way through the maze of by-streets, branching off like veins from the main arteries of Seven Dials and Drury Lane. He was dressed in a decayed-looking Inverness cape, which clung round his lean figure, and he wore a flat felt hat, with the brim slouched low over his brow, thereby hiding a considerable portion of his face, which looked cadaverous and pale, as the glare of a lamp fell on it. He was evidently familiar with the character of the neighborhood, and managed to steer his way clear of all obstructions, stoically disregarding some very uncomplimentary epithets which were hiccoughed at him by a couple of intoxicated men who came reeling past.

With head bent forward and shoulders stooping, as if from weariness, the man kept on, looking neither to right nor left, but creeping along the shadow, as if he found in it some friendly shelter. He stopped at last before a sinister-looking house, in one of the most unpromising of the narrow courts, where one might suppose the sunlight never came. After some prolonged investigation of his pockets, he produced a rusty latch-key, and was about to let himself in,

when the door was opened from the inside, and a shrill female voice called out from the darkness—

"Is that you, Mr. Bland? I've been and put a bit of paper in your room, which I 'ope you'll attend to, as it's the rent."

He passed on with a muttered monosyllable, and groped his way up the dark staircase, which creaked under his heavy tread. A few minutes more, and he had stumbled into the close little den which his landlady dignified with the appellation of his room. When he had succeeded in lighting a miserable tallow dip, placed ready on the shelf that contained his supply of domestic crockery, he hastily improvised a candlestick of a broken beer-bottle, and throwing himself on the truckle-bed, which was the chief article of furniture, tossed his hat into a corner and took a leisurely survey of the wretched attic, from which he was threatened expulsion for the sake of the few weeks' rent which he had found it impossible to pay out of empty pockets. He twisted his fingers into his long, ragged mustache, and his glance fell on a grimy bit of paper which he judged to be the bill just mentioned to him by the woman of the house. He ran his eyes over it, then threw it back, with a bitter smile curling his lips, muttering, "If that old Jezebel can succeed in drawing blood from a stone, she will get her rent paid to-morrow morning, and I shall be quite satisfied. I give her free license to take all the money she can find here."

As he spoke he plunged his hands into his pockets with a low whistle at his own dismal joke. Then, after a few moments' deliberation, drew out a tawny-looking pipe, and lighting it, gave himself up to the enjoyment of what he considered to be a luxury.

"The last of my friendly weed," he muttered, crushing an empty tobacco-pouch in his hand. "It has been a good friend, for it has stood me in place of many a meal. It's so convenient to take the edge off one's appetite when there's nothing in the larder, I call it a kind of compromise with one's stomach; but now even this comfort fails me. Clearly I am at the end of my resources, and the game's nearly up. Seeking, seeking, and still no nearer. What if, after all my trouble, the young fellow should have taken it into his head to die, and there is no heir to reward me for my exertions in his favor? Then my valuable secret becomes unsalable, and I withdraw, beaten in my last chance, and much worse off than when I left India. The next move will be to introduce myself to my highly-respectable relatives, who will no doubt be overjoyed to receive me. Perhaps I may find it needful to resume my own name in honor of the hopeful son, whom they used to flatter by saying he was like me."

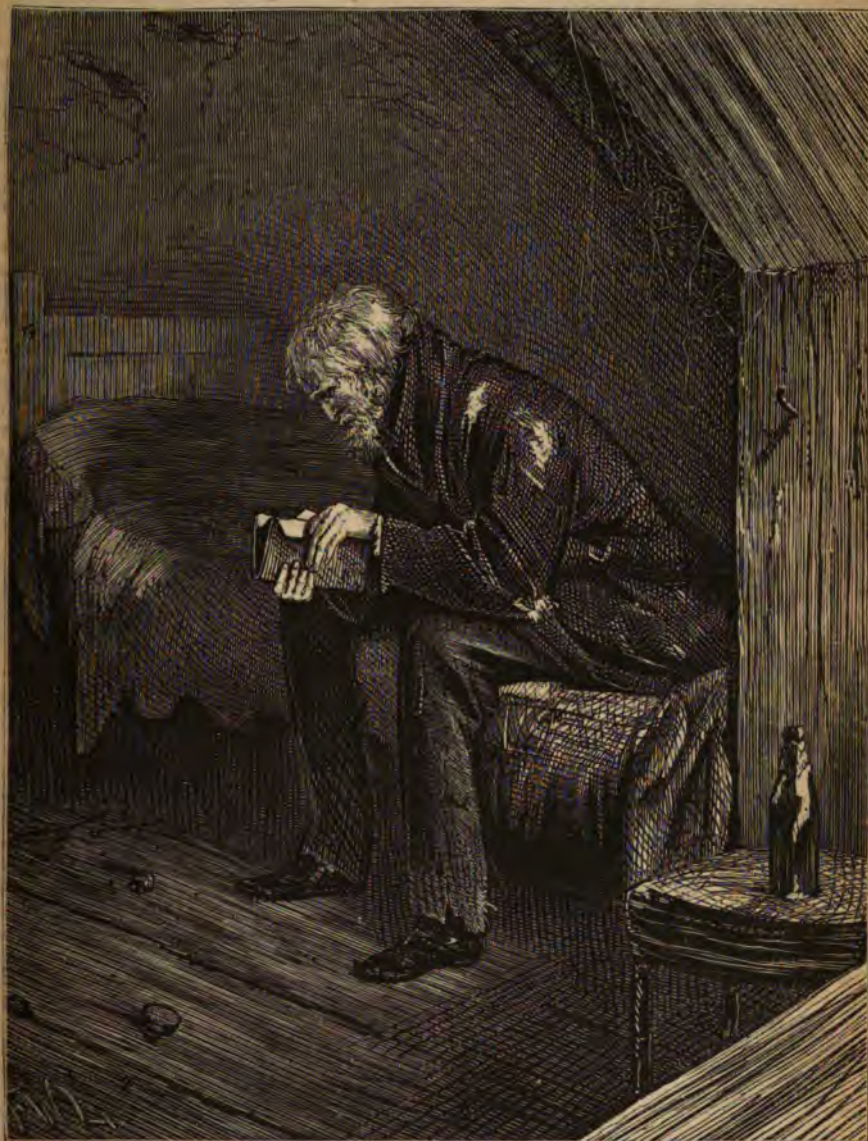
Here he caressed his mustache with a feeble little smirk of vanity that seemed miserably out of place.

The gray light of dawn found the inmate of the attic still up and wakeful. He had divested himself of the Inverness cape, and sat on the



edge of the bed, with head bent down, and hands clasping his knees. While the candle lasted, he had been busy with researches in a leather pocket-book, from which he took a yellow old letter, enclosing several slips of discolored-looking paper, memorandums of dates and names. These he spread out, and slowly read: "Charles

of his birth, and that of the marriage of his father and mother, legally solemnized in a certain village in Kent. By Jove! I deserve to be well paid for all this trouble. I was led to believe that the first Mrs. Rivers had a brother, a lawyer, in London. I must seek him out. The prospect of a fortune coming to his family may



"Let me think."

Rivers, son of Colonel Rivers and Dorothy his wife, born Calcutta, August," etc.

"Let me think: if he is alive now, his age will be about twenty-seven or eight. Well, if he does turn up, and there's any dispute about identity, I've taken care to secure the register

prove a good bait. His lawyer's wit may help me through the rest. In any case, I can make his purse pay the expense of advertising. So far so good. I see that I am equal to the occasion."

With this final conclusion he put the papers

back in the pocket-book, and carefully refastening the strap, threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and prepared to steal a few hours' sleep on that most uninviting couch.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### BROOMBANK.

BROOMBANK, the home of Daniel Crawton, was a large square pile of stone, built on the best site which the neighborhood could furnish for a house of its pretensions. It boasted a fine sweep of park-land, an imposing frontage, and a display of massive masonry, which took from the lightness of effect, but gave an air of solidity and substance suggestive of endurance and strength. There was a touch of originality about the building, and an occasional departure from architectural rules, as though the architect had designed to make experiments of some favorite idea, or studied to please individual taste. This was the truth; for Daniel Crawton, the owner of the house, had himself superintended its erection and drawn out the plans. The interior corresponded with the rest; there was the same massive character about the rich furniture, and the stately rooms had an air of stern realism, as if nothing light or superficial could be tolerated there. One looked in vain, among the solid facts of mahogany and rosewood, for the pretty toy-like ornaments and elegant trifles which are usually conspicuous in the make-up of modern drawing-rooms. Above all, the house wanted the supervision of a loving woman's hand. Those indefinable softening touches which are the signs of her influence, and attest in so many nameless ways that presence which lights up the atmosphere of home, as sunbeams brighten a landscape. Who shall say that this was not often realized by the successful man of money when he sat in barren state, with the grave butler at his elbow, and the costly show of plate on his table?—that there were not times when a keen perception of his loss was borne to him like the memory of a dead perfume wafted from the past, which had buried the only bit of youthful romance which his life had ever known?—times when he looked longingly back across the bleak, rugged mountain-path which he had climbed, resolutely setting his face against the domestic blessings which most men covet as the reward of their labors. It was, perhaps, his own bachelor experience that influenced him to decide in favor of his nephew's marriage.

"Broombank will want a mistress, Mark, therefore I wish you to marry early, presuming, of course, that you choose wisely. Many dire mistakes are made in that way, and much ruin follows; so I forewarn you, be cautious."

To which Mark, with his humble, smiling manner and the peculiar oily roll of his voice, replied, "I may say that I have already chosen, uncle, subject, of course, to your approval, as it

only remains for you to decide upon the wisdom of my selection."

"Oh, indeed! then you have anticipated me. That is what I call taking time by the forelock. Pray who is the young lady?"

"Your ward, Miss Rivers."

The merchant looked at him gravely, and reflectively rubbed one of his gray whiskers, slowly repeating, "My ward."

"Yes, uncle. Do you see any objection?"

"None; on the contrary, I am pleased. But are you sure of your chance of success? May Rivers is a strange, willful girl; do you think she likes you, Mark?"

The young man smiled, and glanced complacently at the reflection of himself in an opposite mirror, saying, in an insinuating tone, that would have been highly exasperating to young May, "If she does not, she can be won; that is not an insurmountable difficulty. But I can not well discuss my own claims; enough for me that you have given your consent for me to try to win her."

"Very good, Mark; but remember, I give you that consent subject to the same obligations which I should impose on any other suitor. The care of May Rivers was a death-bed trust, which will not cease with the legal termination of my guardianship. Her father's will elected me to fill his place, so I shall hold it my duty to watch over her interests even when she is nominally beyond my control. Understand me, Mark, your choice pleases me, and you have my full consent to try and win the girl if you can. Be sure that you love her as a true man should love the woman he marries."

With all his control over himself, Mark Danson winced at the words; for the thought of Giles Royton's daughter gloomed over him like a sudden cloud, and he turned sick with dismay as his mind shadowed out the possible result of an exposure of his villainy. Any thing but that—safety must be bought at any cost. It was beggary, disgrace; or Broombank wealth and social position. These were the alternatives that lay before him.

This conversation between the uncle and nephew took place over the breakfast-table at Broombank, on the morning of the day that May Rivers and her Aunt Lydia were expected as guests at dinner. To the young man's great relief, his uncle was too much occupied to notice any thing unusual in his manner.

"Mark," he continued, gravely, "you wonder to hear the cynical old man talking in this strain, but about these things I speak as I feel, strongly. Boy, I would rather follow young May Rivers to her grave, than have her wedded to one who would turn traitor to his vows, and make her life a martyrdom, as so many women's are."

His gray eyes flashed as he spoke, and there was lion-like fierceness in his look and tone. In his heart, Mark quailed before him, but he managed to throw a sense of injury into his words as he said, "Do you doubt me, uncle?"



"No, Mark; my treatment of you should suffice for an answer. But there are times when I remember that you are a Danson, and your father's son."

He broke off abruptly, and pushing the chair from him, began pacing the room with heavy tread. The mention of Mark's father had brought back a painful story of humiliation and disgrace. There had been a crushed, broken-spirited wife, and a heartless, dissipated husband squandering her substance, then deserting her and his child, stealing away, none knew whither, to spend the rest of his disreputable life. Mark knew all, and often brooded over it with bitterness, for it was a wound to his pride. For many years nothing had been heard of his father, whom all believed to be dead.

"That I am a Danson, sir, may be my misfortune," said Mark, "but not my fault. I am not to be held accountable for my father's sins."

The merchant stopped short in his walk, as he replied, "You are right, Mark, that would not be just; yet I recollect that, with even less reason, you were ready to distrust Hugh Cawton for his father's sake; but now dismiss this vexed subject. Ring the bell, and order the carriage round. It is time we left Mrs. Crane to her own resources for the rest of the day."

Mrs. Crane was a cousin of Daniel Cawton's, a mild-looking, elderly lady, who seldom raised her voice above a certain level, and whose law of life had been always "peace at any cost." The widow of a clergyman with slender means, she had been glad to accept the offer of a home at Broombank, where she became the head of domestic affairs, discharging all the duties of a housekeeper, though such was not exactly her position, as the master always took especial care to have her recognized as a member of the family.

The presence of Mrs. Crane was a great boon to Aunt Lydia, when she went with her niece to pay one of their state visits: it was a relief to the monotony of the day. After a solemn talk with May's guardian, whom she held in profound awe, or an equally solemn game at chess, which always put her into a state of nervousness, she enjoyed nothing so much as a confidential gossip with Mrs. Crane, when they compared notes of their experience in the mysteries of pickles and preserves, or sounded a chord of mutual lament over the degeneracy of the times.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tea had been removed, and the drawing-room at Broombank had put on a look of unvoiced cheerfulness, in honor, perhaps, of May Rivers and her bright eyes. The elders had settled down to their familiar relaxations; the party, as usual, consisting of Mrs. Crane, Aunt Lydia, and Daniel Cawton, with his old friend Dr. Grimes, a retired physician who lived in the neighborhood, and often dropped in to spend his evenings. Left to her own resources for entertainment, May sat listlessly turning over

the pages of a heavy folio of music, which she irreverently styled as "venerable as the hills." She was looking very pretty and attractive in her handsome dress of blue silk and black lace, with the band of pearls in her hair. Aunt Lydia loved to see her darling elaborately dressed; and if her advice had been accepted, she would have indulged her passion for display far beyond May's simple tastes. There was a rich glow on the girl's cheek, and an animated sparkle in her eyes, though she was only prattling small-talk with Mark Danson, who stood beside her chair. Acting on the morning's conversation with his uncle, he had assiduously tried to improve the occasion by devoting himself to the young heiress, though at the same time cautious not to risk offending her by undue assumption or too pointed attentions.

"If the weather was more propitious to my wishes," he said, smiling, "I should be tempted to whisper, 'Come into the garden,' May. That suits the invitation quite as well as 'Maude,' and, in my opinion, is a much prettier name."

May replied, saucily, "The question of names is so purely a matter of taste, Mr. Danson, that it seems to me scarcely worth discussion; but so far as I am concerned, I decidedly prefer being addressed as Miss Rivers, for I never encourage my acquaintances to call me May."

Mark, inwardly chafed at her manner, bit his lip, as he said: "I ventured to count myself something more than a mere acquaintance. I am sorry to find I have been in error."

"So am I, Mr. Danson. Such discoveries are not pleasant to make about ourselves; but your error is really so trifling that it is repaired simply by its acknowledgment."

Mark bowed. "Yet I can not help protesting against your hard prohibition, Miss Rivers. May I hope that it will soon be revoked in my favor?"

"Hope nothing concerning me, if you are wise, Mr. Danson."

"But at least there is no reason why we should not be friends," persisted Mark, determined, if possible, to gain his point.

May replied, with provoking coolness, "Certainly, there is no reason, except that I have peculiar ideas about friendship which would be likely to clash with yours. Will you oblige me by standing a little farther away? you obstruct the light, and I wish to study the progress of the game from the faces of the players." She continued: "I should feel it rather formidable to sit down to a game of chess with Mr. Cawton, for I don't think it is in him to trifle about anything. Well, I like people to be thoroughly in earnest about what they do, whether it be work or play. Excuse me, Mr. Danson, I am not unreasonable enough to expect you to waste your conversational powers upon me any longer this evening, for I confess that I have not been a very attentive listener; but you must put it down to my want of good taste."

"I shall do nothing so uncivil, Miss Rivers; and however I may regret, I must be satisfied with what pleases you."

A dull heat burned in Mark's colorless face, and his eyes contracted under their falling lids, as they had often a trick of doing. But May did not then understand his peculiarities. She heard only his courteous answer; and it seemed so much better than she deserved that she felt ashamed of her own brusqueness. She would have changed her opinion, if she had heard his confidential whisper to himself that night as he paced the terrace walk, smoking his cigar and cooling his hot forehead in the wind: "I will win her, if it is only to humble her. Then, my proud lady, we will be quits for all these insults. They shall be paid back with compound interest, for I am always punctual in the discharge of such debts."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FEELING HIS WAY.

HUGH CRAWTON's introduction into the office of his uncle did nothing to remove the estrangement between the brothers, contrary, perhaps, to his mother's expectation, and the disappointment of some hope which she had allowed herself to cherish in secret; but she buried it softly without a murmur of complaint. The daily discipline of her life had been submission and patience.

"It must be for the best, dear," she said, cheerfully, to her daughter. "Since this which I desire so much is withheld, it is for some wise and merciful purpose that is not for me to see; we must learn to trust where we can not trace His hand."

The mother and daughter were sitting at work in the early hours of the spring afternoon, stitching, as Chriss grumbly remarked, like a pair of white slaves. One broad bar of sunshine fell between them, catching some glossy ripples of the young girl's hair, and shimmering over her homely stuff dress in warm gleams of gold. The window was open, letting in the soft spring air laden with scent of hawthorn blossoms, and bringing whispers of sweet bird-music and the fresh May bloom and beauty that was helping to make the world so fair.

Margaret lifted her head and looked out into the dull paved street with a regretful feeling that found expression in a little sigh of weariness when she dropped her eyelids, and fixed her attention again upon her work. Mrs. Crawton's gentle face caught the shadow as it passed, and her wistful eyes grew troubled as she watched the young face. She said, softly, "You are tired, Margaret."

The girl replied, hastily, "It is nothing to talk about, mother, only I was what Chriss calls giving way, for I seemed to smell the hawthorn, and was seized with an absurd longing to be out

in the fields, weaving myself a crown of white blossoms or wading through a field of buttercups—both very undignified proceedings for a person of my years. But don't mind me, mother, I have returned to common sense, and made up my mind to get this wristband stitched and set on before the end of the half hour."

At that moment Chriss made her appearance with a letter, which she carried distrustfully between her finger and thumb, evidently regarding it with suspicion. She had not forgotten the memorable visit of the sheriff's officers, and lived in daily fear of a repetition, looking upon letters as possible omens of evil, for she knew the family were still immersed in difficulties, and at the mercy of sundry creditors. Though the sums owing were comparatively small, they represented a hopeless mountain of debt to poor Chriss. Her rugged face was not wearing its most agreeable look that day. It might be noticed that her temper fluctuated with the state of the family exchequer, for she became more irascible and cross-grained in proportion as the household funds ran low, and she found it more difficult to carry out the various little stratagems which she employed to soften the hard facts of poverty to her beloved mistress. She jerked the letter forward with a discontented sniff that concealed keen anxiety, for she contrived to pass behind Margaret's chair, and whisper gruffly, "Mind, Miss Margaret, if it's bad news, you are to let me know it; I won't be kept out of my share if there's trouble coming."

Mrs. Crawton divined the meaning of the movement, and looked up from the letter she was reading, smiling to put at rest the fears of her old servant. "Make your mind easy, Chriss; it is nothing, except, perhaps, a little vexation for you, for Hugh has written to warn us that he will bring home with him this evening his cousin, Mr. Danson. I should have preferred this visit to have been delayed for a few weeks, but we must make the best of it now."

This intimation was sufficient for Chriss. Here was an unexpected contingency that would require all her energies, and her active mind was already busy with ways and means, scheming how to supply certain deficiencies in the provision department. For she reflected there would be tea and supper to prepare for the visitor, who was one of master's rich relations; that was a double reason why the dignity of the family should be kept up.

"I'll do my best, if I have to live on dry bread and weak tea for a month; that fine young master sha'n't have the chance of thinking we're too poor to give him a meal."

Here Chriss went back to her kitchen with a flushed face, the excitement of preparation already upon her. Margaret paused in her work, saying thoughtfully, "So at last he is coming here, this Cousin Mark, who is to be Uncle Daniel's heir. Mother, from the first week that Hugh entered his situation, I have had a strong wish to see Mark Danson; and sometimes I have wondered if he will have power to influ-

once Hugh's future, and whether it will be for good or ill. He is very friendly now, but I can not tell if Hugh thoroughly likes him."

"I never heard Hugh say any thing to his cousin's disparagement," replied Mrs. Crawton, quietly folding her son's note.

"Neither have I, mother; but you must re-

her brother, and that the time would come when she would remember them in anguish of spirit. At that moment the attention of mother and daughter was arrested by a sound from the sofa. It was Mr. Crawton's pleasure to apprise them that he had just awoke from his afternoon sleep. Unsuspected by them, he had seen the entrance



"You are tired, Margaret."

member that Hugh is not a talker, and does not discuss his friends. Cousin Mark's character will be quite safe in his hands; but I confess that I am far from being so charitable."

How little did Margaret Crawton guess that some of her words would be sadly prophetic to

of Chriss with the letter, and overheard most of the low-voiced talk that followed.

Ever thoughtful of his feelings, and anxious to spare his morbid susceptibility any real or fancied wound, Mrs. Crawton hastily left her work and went to him with Hugh's note in her

hand. She was met by the usual querulous spirit of complaint.

"My dear, what was all that whispering about Hugh and Mark Danson? I only caught some of the words. It seems that I am always to receive my information at second hand," he added jealously.

"We did not know you were awake, Robert. There is nothing to tell, except that Hugh has written to inform us that Mark Danson is coming home with him this evening."

The invalid's face flushed, and there was a peculiar twitching of his mouth when he spoke. Mrs. Crawton knew that he was annoyed.

"My nephew Mark coming here, and without my invitation! to be a spy upon us in our poverty, of course with the connivance of his uncle; trying to find any thing that may tell against us: I did not think Daniel Crawton would have lent himself to such meanness."

Before her mother could answer, Margaret's voice struck in, as it often did on these occasions, when she rebelled against her father's irritating selfishness, and refused to let him hold his own in what she felt to be injustice.

"Father, I would scorn such suspicion as perfectly unworthy. I know nothing of Uncle Daniel, except what I have heard from others; but whatever his faults may be, I feel sure that meanness is not one of them. He has nothing to do with Mark Danson's visit here. It is simply an arrangement between him and Hugh."

Her fine statuesque face had kindled into sudden life and color. It could be seen that she was thoroughly in earnest.

Mr. Crawton did not answer, but gave his patient wife a look that seemed to say, "This is your training of your daughter." She offered him Hugh's note, but he pushed it from him, saying, "Never mind, my dear; whether I read it or not is of little consequence. I am nobody in these days, and perhaps it is as well that I should be put aside altogether. But about this visit of my nephew's; I think it was wrong for Hugh to encourage him to come here. He might have known that it would not be pleasant to me."

There was a pause. Mrs. Crawton made a sign to Margaret to remain silent. She busied herself about the sofa-cushions, the quiet tears welling into her eyes, and on her face the old look of dumb pain—the look that is born of a wounded spirit. But Robert Crawton, comfortably blind in his egotism, was unconscious that any thing was wrong.

"My dear, you must remember that I shall be obliged to change this shabby coat and necktie, and we ought to have a bottle of wine. I should not like to feel humbled before George Danson's son."

"A bottle of wine," breathed Margaret, with a sigh, as she stitched hard at her wristband. "How does he think we can get the money to pay for it? Oh, mother, I can see that while father is in that frame of mind, you must bear your burden alone for any help that he will give you."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "GOOD DOG."

"I CAN not tell what pleasure it is to find myself so kindly received among you, aunt," murmured the smooth voice of Mark Danson, dropping into a confidential undertone, as he succeeded in securing Mrs. Crawton's attention to himself for a few minutes. It was the chance for which he had watched during the whole of the evening. He glanced towards the others to satisfy himself that they were preoccupied. Hugh was holding a good-humored argument with his father concerning some old historical dates, and Margaret was attentively listening to something which was being whispered to her by a pleasant-faced young man who had unexpectedly made another guest at the Crawton's tea-table that evening, and who had been introduced to Mark as Mr. Marston. He fancied that some engagement existed between this stranger and the fair Margaret, whose stately beauty had taken him by surprise. He continued, "I scarcely expected that Uncle Robert would remember the little boy whom he had not seen since his sister's funeral, so I was agreeably surprised to find that I was recognized; but more than all I am gratified that he thinks me like my mother."

Mrs. Crawton's soft eyes beamed kindly on the speaker; she was won by his manner of mentioning his mother, and felt inclined to regret the injustice of her first impression, which had been one of involuntary misgiving and doubt. Mark saw what he had gained, and was not slow to pursue his advantage.

"I want to feel myself one among you, aunt, so I shall petition to be allowed to come here as often as I please. For Hugh's sake, I trust this will be the prelude to another reunion that will make us no longer a divided family. I mean—"

Here he was interrupted. Hugh called across the room, referring to him as an authority on the point under discussion. He had only time to add, hurriedly, "I mean Uncle Daniel; for I have hope that, with our united efforts, the ice will break."

Mrs. Crawton had not time to answer, but her face visibly brightened. He noted it, as the effect of his last words, and silently drew his conclusion.

"I see she is anxious for a reconciliation. Now, I must sound the feelings of the other on the subject."

Before he left that night he contrived to ingratiate himself with Uncle Robert, adroitly playing on his weak points, and dissecting his character with the coolness and skill of a clever psychologist. The result was a pressing invitation to repeat his visit in a few days.

The invalid kept up wonderfully well through the evening, and astonished those about him by the exertions which he made for the entertainment of his nephew, whom he had hitherto regarded with fear and dislike, as the inter-

loper who had usurped his son's place and his own.

With the exception of Margaret, who kept aloof from all friendly approaches, and would not be won out of her frigid reserve, Mark was fully satisfied with the impression which he had made on his first visit to the home of Hugh Cawton. He felt instinctively that the sister regarded him with suspicion, and she was Eleanor's friend. It was needful for him to be well upon his guard. Then the stranger, Mr. Marston, they had scarcely exchanged a dozen words since his introduction, yet he felt that there was antagonism between them. Another jarring element in his evening's enjoyment was the presence of a little sharp-eared terrier belonging to Hugh. It had chosen to take offense at his appearance, and refused to be conciliated, making unpleasant demonstrations about his legs, and testifying its hostility in a series of low snarls.

"I say, Hugh, old fellow, if that is your dog, I don't admire your choice; for I think it the ugliest little brute that I have seen for some time."

Margaret overheard Mark's words, and, to the speaker's intense disgust, called the dog to her side and began petting it, in spite of a reproving glance from her father.

Before Mark left the animal became almost frantic. When Mark shook hands with Hugh, and laid his hand familiarly on his shoulder, the dog would have sprung at him and torn his arm, if he had not been forcibly restrained. Did his faithful instinct scent danger to his master in that companionship? Good dog; he did what he could when he barked out the traitor, and crept back to Hugh's feet as if he thought it needful to keep guard there.

"I never saw Jip behave like this before," remarked Mrs. Cawton.

"Nor have I," struck in Margaret, with a steady look into her brother's eyes. "The reason is that he does not like our cousin Mark, and neither do I; for, with all his fair seeming and his smooth professions, I would not trust him to the length of my little finger. Hugh, remember my advice, and take warning from your dog."

But her brother only threw back his curly head, and laughed it off in his bright way. Yet the time did come when he had cause to remember his sister's words that night.

## CHAPTER XX.

### LAWYER MARKHAM AND HIS CLIENT.

"ARE you Lawyer Markham?"

"I believe I am. What is your business?"

"Something that will surprise you, I fancy. But first tell me if there is any other Lawyer Markham besides yourself."

"If there is, I am not aware of it."

The answer was given stiffly, with a careful professional survey of the shabbily-dressed man who had just presented himself at the office of Anthony Markham, attorney, Gray's Inn. The scrutiny ended in a doubtful sniff, for externals were not promising, and did not encourage sanguine expectations of prospective fees. The lawyer was a short, bald-headed man with a small, keen face, and slow, secretive manner. The stranger coolly rested his arm on the desk, saying, "I put the question because I wanted to be sure that I had unearthed the right fox. Excuse me, Mr. Markham, I meant no invidious comparison."

He stroked his mustache and smiled at his own joke, which the lawyer quietly ignored, not deigning to see the point of the humor.

"Whatever may be your business with me, I must beg you to be brief, as my time is of value. I believe there is a client waiting now in the other office."

"Very good, sir; saving time is quite as much an object to me as you. But mine is not altogether legal business. It concerns some of your own family. You had a sister Dorothy—"

He was interrupted by an exclamation of astonishment.

"And if I had a sister Dorothy, what can you know about her?"

"The man continued, without noticing the remark, "She made what her friends considered a good match, for she married Captain (afterwards Colonel) Rivers, and went out with him to India, where she died."

The listener made no secret of his increasing astonishment. He irritated his bald head with the tip of his quill as he exclaimed, "Bless me, I am quite in the dark! What are you going to tell me next?"

"I will tell you. Mrs. Rivers left an only son, who disappeared in a very mysterious way about four years after his father's second marriage."

"Ah! you know that also. Who may you be, and where did you spring from?"

"My own personality has nothing to do with my business here, for you will know me no better when I tell you that I am called George Bland. I claim England as my mother-country, but I have been a wanderer for the most part of my life. The last place I came from was Calcutta, where your sister spent her brief married life."

"Poor Dora," muttered the lawyer, with a passing touch of sentiment; "she was always delicate. I had my fears of the climate when she first went out, but it seemed all for the best."

"Did you see much of the late colonel after your sister's death?" the man asked somewhat abruptly.

"No; only for a few months during his widowhood, when he visited England with the boy. After that time we were—"

"Not very good friends," added the stranger, finishing the sentence as the speaker paused.



"Well, perhaps we were not," assented the lawyer, "but all this is out of business. I do not give my time to clients for the purpose of answering idle questions about my family affairs."

"Excuse me, Mr. Markham, these are not idle questions, nor are they out of business, as I will prove."

"Very good, but please open your case clearly. I can do nothing with vague hints," replied the lawyer, testily.

"Yet I must put one more question. Did it never strike you that there was something very suspicious about your nephew's strange disappearance?"

Mr. Markham was impatiently fingering his gold seals and comparing his watch with the timepiece on the mantel. He replied, "Yes, it did at the time, poor boy; but I always had the impression that he met his death by some unfortunate accident."

"Yet his body was never found, or any trace," said the man, twisting his mustache with a peculiar look of significance.

The lawyer started, struck by something in the tone of the words. He lifted his keen face as though he had caught a new idea, for the moment throwing off his professional manner, and becoming excited and earnest.

"Speak out, Mr. Bland, no use beating longer about the bush; I know now there is something behind all this. You have news of my nephew; is he living?"

"Yes, for any thing that I know to the contrary, living, and in England; but there, unluckily, the scent is lost, like his identity, which I have travelled from Calcutta for the sole purpose of tracking out, if possible. Now I come to business. I apply to you, his uncle, as the only one likely to give the case a friendly lift. So far I have not spared my own exertions, and I am still willing to take any amount of trouble. But circumstances over which I have had no control, etc.—in short, cash is at an uncommonly low ebb with me at the present time, and in pursuing a search of this kind you will be aware that there are difficulties to be met, and certain bits of machinery to be set in motion which can not be done without funds."

"I understand," said the listener, dryly.

Lawyer Markham loved his money, and, if he could help it, never parted with a shilling without good percentage.

"As a matter of business, it may turn out a profitable investment," pursued the stranger, falling in with the lawyer's tone. He had taken his measure pretty correctly during the interview, and knew exactly what manner of man he was dealing with. "Then it will be befriending your own nephew, who is very likely fagging on in some obscure corner of London, hard up both for friends and money. It is worth a struggle to get the poor young fellow restored to his birthright—the wealth which has passed to his half-sister. To my mind, it is a pity for a fine fortune to be thrown away on a girl; I

don't approve of the weaker vessels being made too independent."

The last part of the speech was lost upon the listener; it was irrelevant to the subject in hand, and therefore passed aside without notice.

"A strange story," commented the lawyer, when the man had finished his recital of what he knew concerning the mysterious disappearance of Colonel Rivers's son; "a strange story! How am I to know that it is not one of the many tricks got up to extort money? It is quite a trade in these days."

The stranger laughed. "But in that case does it not strike you that I should be an ass to venture such an experiment with a lawyer? I might be sure that it would be 'diamond cut diamond.'"

Mr. Markham drew in the corners of his mouth, and made frowning creases in his forehead; he took time to consider his answer, for he found something offensive in the tone of these remarks, and resented as insolence to himself the man's free-and-easy manner. His profession had familiarized him with many strange phases of life, and brought him in contact with varied grades and conditions of men, often obliging him to pocket affronts in the way of business, where the work was not always scrupulously clean. But that was in the days when he was a rising man, and had his way to make; now it was made, and he could afford to stand a little on his own personal dignity. He spoke coldly, "I must beg you to keep to the point, Mr. Bland, for I have neither time nor patience to waste."

Here he was interrupted.

"Which means that from the cut of my clothes, you take me for a needy adventurer."

"And granted that I do, what credentials have you to prove the contrary, and how can you vouch for the truth of your statements?"

"Very easily," returned the man, drawing a faded roll of papers from the depths of a somewhat bulky pocket-book. "I believe there is enough here to serve me that good turn. Two letters, valuable as evidence, from the chief actor himself, dictated on his death-bed, and fully proving what you lawyers call the abduction; and here is a copy of the register of the boy's birth, and another of your sister's marriage, to which I see you were a witness. You are at liberty to compare it with that of the church where the said marriage took place."

"Ah! very good. I am to understand that you give these papers up to me, as the nearest living relation of the missing heir." Here the lawyer condescended to hold out his hand to receive them.

Mr. Bland replied, coolly retaining the packet under his fingers, "Yes, but you must be aware that you take them only on certain conditions. I have given you a hint that my worldly affairs are not as flourishing as they might be—in short, that cash is an object. Knowing this, you can not suppose that I took the journey from India, and began this hunting about

the world for a young man to take possession of a fortune, simply from the abstract pleasure of seeing him do it. Thank you, I am not so disinterested."

"Of course not," responded the lawyer dryly; "I could not wrong you by such a supposition."

The man eyed him distrustfully, as he continued "I have naturally looked upon the possession of this information as something that would bring me benefit in the event of success."

"Certainly," put in Mr. Markham, "you will have a claim to remuneration for your services. But my impression is that the whole thing is hopeless; for, even if you knew the young man to be living, you have no clue to trace him, and he is as likely to be in Africa as London. However, if I am satisfied by my inspection of these papers, I am willing in my nephew's interest to advance you such sums as I may think needful. But mark, I will have no talk of conditions with regard to my share in the transaction. I must be dealt with in perfect confidence, or I wash my hands of it, even if he were my own son."

"That would be scarcely business-like," said the stranger, composedly, "for it may bring grist to the mill; and in the event of a dispute on the other side, it may grow into a great law-case, and get talked about in the papers. But setting all this aside, will you allow me to ask if you have a vivid remembrance of your sister and her husband—enough, for instance, to make you quickly recognize their features if you should chance to meet any one like them?"

"Yes; I believe I have."

At this moment a clerk knocked at the door to inform his master that a Mr. Marston wished to see him.

"Very well, Thompson; I shall be disengaged in a few minutes."

The clerk answered that the gentleman was pressed for time.

"Which, luckily, I am not," put in Mr. Bland, readily. "So, as our business can wait, Mr. Markham, by your leave I will oblige the gentleman by taking up my quarters in the next office until you are at liberty."

The lawyer assented, and Mr. Bland passed out, meeting on his way the pale, consumptive-looking clerk, followed by a tall, gentlemanly young man, whom he favored with a critical, inquisitive look, muttering, "Marston—Marston; I've heard that name somewhere. Ah! I have it. My young gentleman, I must keep an eye on you. Bravo, George! It may be that you are on the track at last."

their fates, and that their next interview must decide between them a question of vital interest to both. Wondering what it could mean, she waited in painful anxiety, with a strange flutter at her heart, and a creeping back of some of the old tender feelings, as she grieved over her fallen idol, and tried to patch her broken faith in the man she had loved. Might she dare to hope that his tardy repentance had come, and his promise would be redeemed at last? Poor, deceived Eleanor, it was sad to know that her own hand had helped to mix the bitter cup which she was draining to the dregs!

With his mind full of his new purpose, Mark found himself again in the neat little parlor of the house in Islington. Eleanor and he sat at opposite sides of the table, with the lighted lamp between them. The little servant, Ann, was dreaming blissfully by the dying kitchen fire, and Giles Royton had not yet returned from the city. Mark guessed how and where the clerk was passing his evening, for he knew that time had not yet cured him of his wretched infatuation for the gaming-table. He was very glad of his absence that night.

Neither of them had spoken for some minutes. Eleanor sat under his gaze, which she felt to be utterly cold and pitiless, trying to choke down words of his which rung in her ears like the last knell of her hopes. Her woman's instinct, sharpened by suffering, told her there was no change in the man—no latent leaning towards love and honor. She made this revelation, drawing in her breath with a spasm of pain, biting her lips in the struggle to hold her will against his, and keep strong in the contest which she knew was coming. He was nervously fingering a paper which he had drawn from his pocket, and intently watching her pale face, with the purple lines under the great misty blue eyes, commenting, under his breath, that Nell was getting to look haggard and old.

Slowly the minutes dragged on, while they sat looking at each other with that dreary blank of silence between them. At last he made a sudden movement, and, leaning forward, pushed the paper on her knee, saying hurriedly, "There it is, Eleanor, better than I can explain in words. Read for yourself. You must see that it is the best and only way to cut the knot of our difficulties."

She spoke not, but took the paper at his bidding, while he rose from his seat and began pacing the narrow limits of the room with the restlessness of a caged animal. Before she had finished he came and stood before her, waiting her decision, and greedily trying to read it in her look.

How slow and mechanical she seemed. He could have torn the answer from her white lips, in his fierce impatience, as he breathed, "Well, Eleanor, what is it to be? Will you be generous and save me?"

Her apparent calmness and want of passion deceived him. She let the heavy lids droop

## CHAPTER XXI.

### WILL SHE SIGN?

THERE was to be another meeting between Mark Danson and Eleanor. He had written telling her that events were hastening a crisis in

over her eyes, and her face was still and cold as a frozen lake. She seemed hardening into a statue of stone.

He repeated, with low vehemence, "Answer me, Eleanor, will you save me?"

Her voice sounded like a hollow echo. "Save you from what?"

"Yes, I know all that; but we can hide it out of sight—the world need never be any wiser about our affairs; and we can satisfy ourselves by signing a mutual agreement to give up our claims on each other."

"This, then, is the crisis in our fates which you said that events were hastening, Mark. I



"Marston—Marston; I've heard that name somewhere."

"The anger of my uncle, and, it may be, the loss of my inheritance—the result of our unlucky marriage, which has been a drag on both our lives."

"True, Mark; but it is a bond which we can not break at our convenience."

am to sign this paper, and leave England with my father, taking with me the secret of my wrongs and your baseness; in consideration of which you propose to settle upon us a yearly pittance out of your wealth, that is to be our purchase-money."



"Nay, Eleanor; I do not put it in that light. You soften nothing."

"Because I give you the truth, unwelcome as it may be. I am in your way, and, to clear your path, you would do any thing that you could with safety to yourself. This paper destroys all that remains of my illusion. I know now what I have to anticipate. I am no more to you than a dead flower, only you can not cast me aside so easily."

"This talk is not like you, Nelly; you are getting cold and hard."

"It may be so; but who is to blame?"

He shrank from the look in her eyes, as she asked the question. Some of her hair had escaped from its fastening, and fallen down over her face—the beautiful sunny hair which she had that night braided for his eyes. She swept it back with an impatient gesture that was new to him, like her manner. He was beginning to fear that she would not yield to his wishes. He took care to keep her in the dark as to his real motives for this step. It would scarcely do for her to know that his object was to endeavor to secure for himself the fortune of May Rivers; his cue was to be silent or vague regarding his own course, and to take advantage of Eleanor's ignorance of the world and its ways. He knew that the least hint of what his ultimate intentions were would, to use his own phrase, "ruin the whole business." As regards Eleanor herself, he thought that, once she was away from every scene or incident that could remind her of former times, she would speedily forget those relations which had been so hastily as well as secretly made, in fresh duties and new associations. Of course he had plenty of excuses for himself; all such reasoners have. But Eleanor, innocent, simple, yet brave-hearted Eleanor, knowing nothing but the fact that the man she had looked up to had degraded himself to the dust, and was now plotting against the one to whom of all others his duty bound him, instinctively felt that this was the time of all times when she should be on her guard, both for his sake and for hers.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN INTERRUPTION.

"ELEANOR," continued Mark, "you will consent to my proposal if you are not blind both to your own good and mine. Far better for us to try to be happy apart, than drag out a life of misery together."

"Yes; far better." She spoke like one talking in sleep.

Still deceived by her manner, he went on: "I will make you all the compensation that I can. Name any sum you please, and if it is within my means, it shall be placed at your disposal; and if your objection is, being required to sign the agreement, tell me, and I will tear it before your eyes. Only give me your promise; I know enough of you to be satisfied that

your word once given will be sure as your written promise."

She was silent. Still the same stony coldness that he could not understand. He bent over her, his breath almost fanning her cheek. "Promise me, Nelly. It is best for us both, or I would not urge it. Give me the paper, and, if you choose, I will destroy it now; your word will be enough for me."

He held out his hand; but, to his surprise, she kept a firm hold on the paper, and, putting him quietly back, thrust it into her bosom.

"What does this mean, Eleanor?"

"That I intend to take charge of this."

"Why?"

"Because I wish it to be preserved."

He forced a laugh. "Nonsense! what purpose could it serve? I told you just now that I was willing to dispense with it if you gave me your promise."

"You did. I have not forgotten that; still, I think it wise to keep the paper by me, for it may prove useful as evidence."

Mark's lips grew livid, as he said, "Still chafing the old sore. Eleanor, what mad folly has seized you?—why do you talk about evidence? I can not understand you to-night." He added, suddenly softening his voice, "Bitter words sound so strange on your lips. What does it all mean?"

"That I have reached the limit of my endurance. After to-night, there will be no longer a shield for you in my weakness."

"Nelly, I will not believe but you are practising some jest upon me—a woman's little artifice to test your power. Come, give me back the paper, and let all be made smooth between us."

"No, Mark, I will not; it is useless to ask me. You are not dealing now with the simple, silly girl who gave her heart in such pure faith, and trusted so blindly where she loved. You have, instead, a woman sad and old before her time, who has passed through the fire and come out seared. You have helped to turn my heart to stone, and stone, you know, is not a yielding thing."

A vague dread was taking possession of Mark. He ground out his answer between his set teeth: "What has come over you, Eleanor? I do not know you like this. Is it possible that you have secured that paper to use as an instrument against me?"

"Yes, if occasion requires, and you goad me to it."

He shrank under her look, as he said, bitterly, "And you are the woman whom I was to have taken home as my wife—a viper always ready with a sting, for I know now that you never loved me."

At last he had overthrown her calmness.

"Never loved you!" she repeated, with a shrill ring of anguish in her voice—"you whom I set up as an idol, and for whose sake I forgot my duty!"

"What else can I think, when you sit there

and taunt and threaten to turn your hand against me as an enemy? If you want me to believe in your love, give me proof by doing what I ask. Save me from the ruin that is sure to follow exposure. If I claim you as my wife while my uncle lives, what will you gain when your husband is made a beggar?"

"I do not mean to share your life," she said, proudly. "I have done with that dream, and my home is with my father while he lives. But first, I must have justice. Acknowledge me as your wife, and confess all to your uncle."

"What! fasten the clog more firmly about my neck? Never!"

She went on rapidly, a vivid streak of crimson burning in her cheeks: "You owe it to others as well as me; for, believing you free, your uncle wishes you to become a suitor to his ward."

He started. "What tattler has been chattering these tales? Do you suppose I am wanting to marry any body else? Ha! ha! 'Once bit, twice shy.' But seriously, you are quite mistaking my intentions. Give your promise, and leave the country, and I don't doubt but that some day I shall be able to acknowledge the fact of our marriage, and will with my own hands tear up the document I know you will be reasonable enough to give me. You see, Eleanor, my object is to make money; and I will make it in my own way. I have told you before that if my uncle knew of our relation to each other, I should be disgraced in his eyes, and there would be an end to all my hopes. What more can I tell you? Now I am sure you will be reasonable, and consent to leave the country—and never come back again, I fervently hope," he added, to himself.

He had some idea that he had only to remove the evil to some distance to get rid of it altogether. In some country of jungles and fever, casualties would happen with more frequency than in a civilized city; and, in short, he looked forward to a time, not very far distant, when he should receive news that he had been set free from his yoke by a more potent agency than it was in his power to use. In the mean time he resolved to keep his uncle quiet by dangling after May Rivers, until that "something or other," as he vaguely shadowed it to himself, should happen, and leave him free to marry his uncle's ward; or rather (shall we say?) her money.

"I refuse to do as you wish," said Eleanor, at length.

"And the paper?"

"I keep, to use if occasion requires."

"Eleanor, you must be going mad! Don't you see that you are driving me to desperation?"

His livid lips were quivering, and his hands clutching together with a nervous, restless action. He was calculating the chances of a physical struggle, looking at the white throat, and longing to grapple for victory with the weak woman's strength.

At that moment the click of a latch-key was heard at the front door.

"Here comes that old fool; he seems fated to be always dogging me like a spy. Ah—"

He drew a long breath, as he uttered the interjection, for he saw that Eleanor had fainted. Excitement and over-wrought feeling had done its work.

Now was his opportunity. If Giles Royton would only get into difficulties with the latch-key, or meet with any other friendly obstruction that would delay his entrance for a few seconds, he would be able to regain possession of the paper without trouble or noise.

"Ah! now I'll be able to secure it," he muttered, fumbling with the fastening of her dress, and feeling for the paper.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE MEETING IN THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

THERE was a brilliant gathering in the rooms of the Royal Academy's exhibition, which presented an animated scene, exciting not only to the charmed circle of art-worshippers, but the good-humored, well-dressed crowd that progressed along the allotted space with considerable energy, breaking into groups before certain favorite pictures, admiring, dissecting, and prattling art-phrases with inexpressible relish. The patrons of art had mustered strongly, and the professional world was well represented, as also was the realm of beauty and fashion.

The throng was at its height, when our old friend, Daniel Cawton, might have been seen making a tour of the rooms, his face wearing a pleasant, relaxed look, that softened all its rugged lines. Perhaps it was called out by the consciousness of his novel position on that sunny afternoon; for he had two ladies under his charge, and was piloting them carefully through the crowd. They were his ward, May Rivers, and her aunt Lydia. Their appearance excited attention, and some speculative whispers followed them as they passed. The dignified spinster, with her air of quaint antiquity, presented a striking contrast to the vision of young beauty at her side; for May Rivers, in her fresh, crisp muslin, with the vapory shawl of black lace falling lightly round her, and the dainty little bonnet, with its simple wreath of forget-me-nots nestling among the glossy coils of dark hair, looked attractive enough to excuse the many glances of admiration directed to her.

"Dear May, this—this crowd is almost too much for me," faltered the spinster, looking appealingly at her niece.

Daniel Cawton caught the words, and said, with visible apprehension, "My dear madam, I hope you are not troubled with delicate nerves; for a fainting woman is one of my horrors. I am just thinking that I ought to have resigned this office to my nephew. He would have made

a better squire of dames, for it is more in his way. And I don't doubt but you would have approved such an alteration in our programme, Miss May."

The young lady did not answer, for her attention was at that moment preoccupied.

He shrugged his shoulders, and whispered a good-humored aside to himself: "Only what I might have expected; the usual fate of old men's speeches. I really ought to have given them over to Mark."

"My dear," whispered dignified Miss Lydia, "I am afraid you have not been attending to what your guardian was saying. Why do you stare at those people in front; don't you know, May, that it is shockingly vulgar for a young lady?"

"Yes, aunt," murmured the girl, pouting her red lips. "If I am not well up in the proprieties, there has been an alarming waste of your wisdom and Miss Beckfield's, for you both labored hard to make me a proper young lady; if you have not succeeded, the fault must be that of the pupil. Hush! let Mr. Crawton get absorbed in his catalogue, this is not for his ears. Well, aunt, to give you a reason for my vulgarity, I was attracted by a face, or rather, two faces; and, don't be shocked, one of them was that of a young man. I fancy they are brother and sister."

Aunt Lydia uttered an interjection of dismay, and strained her short-sighted eyes in the direction indicated by her niece.

"There, aunt, you are looking at the wrong group. I mean that tall, queenly girl in the gray dress, with the straw bonnet and white ribbons, simple enough for a quakeress; but you should see her face: it is like that of some beautiful Greek statue. Whoever she is, I should like to know her. As for the young man, her brother or cousin," she added, with an arch glance at her guardian, "I am undecided what to say about him, except that he looks as if he would be well able to take care of any one he liked."

At that moment Daniel Crawton turned round, saying, "Found at last! Now, ladies, I must hurry you on; for here is something that I particularly wish to show you before we leave—an unpretending little gem by an artist not yet known to fame."

A few more turns, and a little energetic elbowing, soon brought them to a corner where a knot of connoisseurs were discussing the merits of a small painting, which occupied a very modest place, but had won its meed of recognition, as was testified by the cabalistic little red cross in the corner, which indicated that it had been already purchased. Daniel Crawton pointed it out to the ladies, and placed them in the best position which he could obtain for the light, then fell back and studied it in silence. He was a warm and appreciative admirer of art, and though his busy mercantile life had allowed him little leisure for the cultivation of his taste, it still remained the one favorite hobby

which he allowed himself to mount as relaxation from business.

The picture which had attracted him was no brilliant effect of color, and rather disappointed Aunt Lydia, who had no idea of drawing, and was always puzzled to discover the difference between one artist and another. She murmured, "Very pretty, my dear," and gazed at it steadfastly, through her spectacles, until her eyes ached, and she registered a fervent wish that there were no more pictures to be looked at that afternoon.

But May Rivers had caught the painter's meaning. She said nothing in answer to her aunt's comment, but her dark face glowed and her great eyes became suffused. The artist had chosen one of the commonest incidents of every-day life, investing it with homely pathos, and translating with the hand of a master the "touch of nature that makes the whole earth kin."

The picture represented a field-path on a hot summer's day, with a pleasant glimpse of a church peeping through the trees in the distance, so truthfully rendered that one might almost fancy the feel of the crisp, dry leaves in the stirless air, and see the languid droop of the thirsty daisies trying to hide, in the parched grass, from the blinding glare of sunlight.

But the chief interest of the picture lay in the figures that occupied the foreground—a way-worn outcast and his wife resting under a tree. They seemed to have just turned aside from the dusty high road, and dropped down, unable to pursue their weary tramp. The man looked haggard and ill, and the woman was supporting his head, her eyes full of a tender, wistful anxiety, that made her sad, patient face a study, and gave touching suggestiveness to the title, "For Weal or Woe." One felt that she had cast in her lot with the poor fellow until death, and that no amount of rough hardship could kill the woman's love within her. May drew a long breath as she gazed; her guardian had given the signal for them to pass on, but she still lingered before the picture, her heart speaking in her eyes.

"This realizes an idea of my own," she breathed in a whisper, meant only for Aunt Lydia; "I have dreamed of such love; it would make even poverty seem wealth."

Daniel Crawton was her listener, as well as the gentle spinster; and it was his sternly-sounding voice that answered, not unkindly, in spite of its cynical tone—

"Nonsense, child; many other dreamers have dreamed those dreams, and woken to disappointment. Wait till you are older, and the world has taught you some of its wisdom. You will find life too busy and real to feed such romantic fancies."

"Then I shall have learned to hate both the world and its wisdom," retorted May, with a decisive curl of her lips.

Miss Lydia did not venture an opinion, but looked in dismay at her niece. She was appre-

hensive that the conversation would lead to one of the word-contests which were not unfrequent between bold, outspoken May and her guardian. Here there was a momentary block in the brilliant throng. They were obliged to pause, and a little incident occurred which at once diverted the young lady's attention.

her confusion, caught the fixed gaze of a pair of handsome eyes. They belonged to a face which she recognized for its likeness to the pale beauty in the soft gray dress, whose face had so strongly impressed itself on her memory.

"Those two are brother and sister," she decided mentally, then checked herself and blushed



"I beg your pardon."

Something caught the skirt of her dress, and at the same instant a voice said, hastily, "I beg your pardon."

It was a full, manly voice, with a pleasant tone of courtesy, that gave a grace even to the commonplace words. She looked up quickly, and to

at her own promptness in fixing their relationship.

At that moment the voice of her guardian happily created a diversion, and covered her embarrassment. Daniel Crawton had turned round and caught sight of Hugh. The result was a

bow of respectful recognition on the part of the young man, and from his uncle a cordial "Good morning, Hugh. Glad to see you here. I did not know you had a taste for the fine arts."

Hugh's face flushed with pleasure. There was a marked change in the merchant's manner—something that vividly recalled the night of their first meeting, and the memorable incident with which it was associated. There was a gracious unbending from the habitual reserve of the man of business—no longer the stately courtesy of the principal of the firm, but the easy cordiality of a friend, not too far above his junior to be interested in his movements.

Then came the introductions: "My nephew, Hugh Crawton—my ward, Miss Rivers."

There was nothing to excite attention in that simple form of words, yet it was to mark the meeting-point in the currents of two lives; for even then Providence was busily interweaving the threads of their future, though they met and parted as strangers, who might never again be thrown in each other's way. And Daniel Crawton, with his secretly-cherished plans for the happiness of Mark Danson and May Rivers, how little did he guess what would follow the apparently trifling incident of that chance meeting between two whom he would not have associated even in thought!

May's look expressed surprise at the discovery of the relationship between her guardian and the handsome young stranger. But her mind was quick in receiving and adjusting facts. This, then, was Mark Danson's cousin, the clerk, who belonged to that branch of the Crawton family who had been so unfortunate.

She had a vague remembrance of having heard something about his admission into the counting-house. "I will question Mr. Mark Danson, the next time I see him; then I can learn all that I wish to know." This was the resolution which she made to herself, unconsciously that she would be helping to foster the deadly growth of jealousy and hate which was already poisoning the mind of the cousin whom fortune had favored.

They were now joined by Margaret Crawton and her friend, whom Hugh introduced as Mr. Marston. The keen gray eyes of the old merchant were fastened on Margaret's face, until the conscious color finished her pale cheeks, and her eyelids quivered and fell under his earnest gaze.

"And this is my niece, whom I have not seen since she was a child," he said, absently; adding, under his breath, "Beauty, but not like hers; the boy has more of the mother's look."

The pressure of the crowd made it impossible for the group to linger long. A few minutes more, and they had parted to go their separate ways, the brother and sister, and the young artist, to continue their inspection of the pictures, lingering in the charmed atmosphere until the rooms rapidly thinned, and it was time to think of home.

"Marston, let me congratulate you on your

success," whispered Hugh, his face glowing with enthusiasm. "'Weal or Woe' is a triumph, and deserves to make your name as an artist. My uncle and his party paid more attention to that picture than to any in the exhibition. I felt proud of you, old fellow, but disappointed that you would not let me introduce you as the artist; your modesty goes too far."

Charles Marston laughed, and returned the pressure of his friend's hand with compound interest.

In the mean time Daniel Crawton's brougham was far on its way to Broombank, where Miss Rivers and her aunt were going to dine. Taking advantage of her guardian's prolonged reverie, impulsive May put her bright face close to the old lady's and whispered, "Aunt Lydia, did you ever see a lovelier face than that girl Margaret's? I shall dream of her to-night. If I could only have her for a friend! An uncle who deliberately neglects such a niece is nothing more than an insensible iceberg, and I should like to tell him so."

To which the aunt responded with an apprehensive glance towards the opposite side of the carriage, and a warning "Hush! my dear."

At the same time, a whispered discussion of another kind was going on in the omnibus where Hugh Crawton and his sister had taken their seats.

"Well, Madge, at last you have realized one of your wishes—seen and spoken to Uncle Daniel. What do you think of him?"

"I can not tell you at once, Hugh, only that I am sure I should like him if I came to know him better; but I could not bear to displease him, or forfeit his respect."

"Right, Margaret; neither could I," said Hugh, becoming suddenly grave.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### FOILED.

THE street door closed with a bang that resounded through the house, and effectually roused the slumbering faculties of Ann, in the kitchen, helping her clouded perceptions to realize two facts—that the fire had gone out and that her master had come home earlier by some hours than he had been expected.

Giles Royton strode into the passage with an unusually confident air, as though exulting in the consciousness that he had that night successfully resisted temptation, and earned a smile of commendation from his daughter. As his hand rested on the knob of the parlor-door, forgetful, for the moment, of the intended visit of Mark Danson, he caught the rustling of paper, and a muttered exclamation that sounded to his astonished ears very like an oath.

If he had allowed himself a moment's thought, he might have lingered on the threshold, and hesitated before he broke in upon a private interview; but obeying an uncontrollable impulse,



he threw open the door and became a startled witness of the strange scene that was being enacted in that quiet room. Unconscious Eleanor, with her white face looking whiter from contrast with the dark leather chair, and her nerveless hands hanging down passive and powerless, as they had dropped when no longer able to guard

had a keen, wolfish look as he glared at the opening door, conscious that he had lost the chance of repairing his false move. He had further complicated his position, and armed Eleanor with an instrument against him. What might he not have to fear from the anger of a woman smarting under a sense of wrong, and



He caught the rustling of paper, and a muttered exclamation.

the document. There she lay, at the mercy of the man who crouched before her, crushing a paper in his clenched hand, with the muttered imprecation which had been indistinctly caught by Giles Royton. His colorless face rivalled that of the woman in its ghastly pallor, but it

goaded to desperation by injustice and oppression? He was half mad with disappointment and rage; for that which he had hurriedly dragged from the fainting woman proved to be only one of his own letters instead of the important paper. If Giles Royton had delayed

his return a few minutes more, he would have asked no longer time. To be foiled thus had roused the inherent savage in the man's nature—the savage, in propensity and instinct, which had always underlain the surface polish of civilized life, the suave manner and smooth speech. He rose from his crouching position, and glared at Eleanor's father as he advanced, his voice raised in genuine agitation.

"What is the meaning of all this? What have you been doing to my poor girl?"

The man's answer was half sullen and half defiant. "Nothing; she brought it upon herself. It is a woman's common trick for making a scene."

"I don't believe you," growled Giles Royton between his set teeth. "I know you, man; you have been at the root of all the ill that has ever come to her, and you have had your hand in this."

It was no longer the clerk and his employer; social distinctions were dropped between them, and they met on equal ground, with no pretense of disguise for that secret bond of relationship which the rich man's adopted son was so eager to annihilate. There was now no trace of the nervous, deprecating manner. In his own house, the clerk who crept through the counting-house with his head down, and stooped dejectedly over his desk from day to day, stood erect, with anger flaming in his eyes, and voice ready to denounce, in no measured words, the slayer of his daughter's peace. He had now completely sunk the habit of respect which propriety and the strict usage of the house of Crawton and Co. forced him to observe towards the junior partner.

Mark Danson stepped back a few paces from the excited man, leaving a clear space in front of Eleanor's chair. It was his will to crush down all who crossed his wishes. The instinct was in him to spring at his enemy's throat, and settle their grievances in a deadly hand-to-hand struggle. But he could have only dealt thus with the weak and helpless, for he was a coward at heart. Therefore he smothered the passion within him.

The father rushed to the bell, and rung it with a violence that threatened to break the quivering wire. This was almost immediately followed by a stumbling sound on the kitchen-stairs; then the shuffling of slipshod feet along the passage; and, finally, the startled apparition of the girl Ann, perplexed and grimy from her efforts to resuscitate the kitchen fire.

"Quick! bring up some water. Don't stand staring there, stupid!"

She needed no second bidding; it was for her mistress—that was enough to ensure speed. Eleanor ruled the girl with kindness, and, in return, she clung to her with a devoted, dog-like attachment. In his anxiety about his daughter, Giles Royton seemed to have forgotten the presence of Mark Danson.

During the brief interval that passed before the return of the servant, and before Eleanor

showed signs of reviving consciousness, her unscrupulous husband formed a sudden resolution and changed his tactics for the present. He had failed with the daughter, might he not try his success with the father? The old man must have a certain amount of influence with Eleanor; and by persuasion and artful appeals to his interest he might be easily worked upon to exert it for the promotion of his scheme. He foresaw that in his present position a rupture with Royton would be ill-timed. Nothing was to be gained, and much might be lost. It was his policy to conciliate, and, if possible, make use of him.

With all his thoughts for the time engrossed by Eleanor, her father moistened her pale lips, and copiously sprinkled her forehead; while Ann knelt down and chafed her hands with a tenderness which none would have expected from the rough, red-elbowed maid-of-all-work. At last a faint touch of color drifted back to the white face, and, with a long shuddering sigh, the heavily-drooping eyelids were slowly raised. Then, as recollection returned, a spasm of pain contracted her mouth for a moment, and her hand instinctively clutched at the bosom of her dress. She was seeking the paper with a vague fear that it had been torn from her possession. Her father hung over her, anxiously whispering, "Are you better, Nelly?"

The strongest feeling in his nature was love for the beautiful girl who had been his "one ewe lamb."

She answered with difficulty, "Yes, father, you shall know all soon; leave me now a few minutes; I want to talk to him."

Her glance turned towards Mark Danson, who stood on the hearth-stood with his back towards them, apparently studying his face in the chimney-glass. He felt himself touched on the shoulder, and heard Giles Royton's voice saying, abruptly, "She wants you; don't stay long, and be careful how you treat her. Mind, we are not to have that scene over again."

Was that tone of authority for him—Mark Danson? He fired with the desire to resent it, but as quickly cooled down when certain thoughts came crowding on his mind; he could pocket an affront to his pride, when it gained him what he wanted. The next moment he was again alone with Eleanor. The girl Ann followed her master's exit with visible reluctance, for she was doubtful about the state of her mistress. Outside, in the friendly obscurity of the passage, she relieved her feelings by shaking her fist at the parlor door—an explosion of wrath that was intended solely for the bad man, whose coming always made Miss Eleanor ill.

The interview was prolonged until the father grew impatient, and betrayed it by keeping up a sort of sentinel march along the passage, pausing now and then at the room door. At last he heard Mark Danson say, "I leave you to think better of it, Eleanor; you will see it is for the best. You draw back; won't you let me kiss you before I go?"

"No, Mark; can you ask me while you have it in your mind to do me this cruel wrong?"

After a few seconds the door opened, and Mark Danson came out, closing it softly after him. Then the two men faced each other in the passage, the elder standing on the mat with his hand on the handle of the door, ready to show the visitor out.

"Boyton, I want to have some private conversation with you, unknown to Eleanor; but, as that can not be managed to-night, will you come into my office to-morrow—any time when the governor is out of the way, and you know me to be alone? Nay, man, you need not hesitate; it is for her benefit and yours. You are under some misapprehension about the cause of her fainting, and it is due to you to explain."

Here there was a slight noise in the room he had just left. He held up a warning finger as a sign for caution, then dropping his voice repeated his request, urging it with a suppressed earnestness that was not without its influence on the weaker character.

As he anticipated, the required promise was given, somewhat surlily, but that he was quite willing to overlook. "So far, so good," he muttered, as he strode down the path of the weedy little garden. "At best her father is but a feeble old fellow, the slave of his own impulses, whether good or bad. He never was, or will be, a shrewd reasoner. My cue is to persuade him that Eleanor is laboring under an unfortunate delusion, and that their future welfare depends upon my recovery of that paper. Come what may, it will never do to suffer myself to be ruined by the obstinacy of a woman."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HUGH'S PROMOTION.

"WELL, Mark, I have done what you proposed, and appointed Hugh Cawton to take Barton's place. He is young for such a position of trust, and some of the older clerks may think they have been passed over, and that justice has not been done because he is my nephew. No matter, they dare not gainsay my will; I have ascertained that he is qualified, and my own observation confirms your high commendation. I think there is little cause to doubt the fitness of our new cashier. And now, Mark, it is not, as you know, my practice to make such acknowledgments, but I must tell you I have watched your friendly interest in Hugh Cawton; it has pleased me for several reasons, and set at rest some doubts which crossed my mind concerning you; I am glad to find they were without foundation."

A satisfied look stole over Mark Danson's face, as he bent over the packet of letters which it was his business to read aloud and answer for his uncle. So far, all was going well. The appointment, which he had exerted himself to obtain for Hugh to fill—the post left vacant by

the ill-health of the old cashier, Barton—had proved a successful stroke of policy on his own account, and produced all the effect desired; for besides earning him golden opinions from his uncle, and securing the hold upon his favor, which he had lately begun to fear that he was losing, it had completely won for him the confidence of the generous, high-principled young man, in whose interest he seemed to have labored with such disinterested zeal, while it established him on terms of intimacy with his family by giving him a claim upon their gratitude. Even sister Margaret was, for the time, disarmed of her suspicions, and felt ashamed of her distrust when she was gently taken to task by her mother, who pleaded warmly in Mark's defense.

It was some months after the above conversation. As his uncle had foretold, the unexpected change in Hugh Cawton's position had created some dissatisfaction among his fellow-clerks; but he had made himself a favorite among them and contrived to live down his brief unpopularity. Contrary to some predictions, he proved equal to his new duties, and narrowly as he was watched by the keen-eyed principal, he bore the test well.

One morning, during his temporary absence on a business errand, Daniel Cawton had occasion to refer to one of the cash-books, and for that purpose came hurriedly out of his private office. A few moments sufficed to give him the required entry, and he was leaving Hugh's desk, when his coat-sleeve brushed against a sheet of paper hanging out from one of the drawers. Orderly in the most minute details, it had offended his sense of neatness to see it there; but he had forgotten it until thus brought a second time under his notice. It was characteristic of him to stop and try to push the paper back into the drawer, which seemed to have been accidentally closed upon it. While thus engaged, his glance caught sight of something that made him start. He obeyed his first impulse, and, quick as thought, drew forth the paper and read for himself, his mouth gradually hardening into severe lines, and his brow knitting into an ominous frown. Was that paper the clue to some dishonorable secret, which was thus unexpectedly dragged to light? He dropped it as though he had been stung, and looked round in quest of Hugh; but he saw only Mark Danson, hurrying from the counting-house with his hands full of papers, evidently in haste, and looking preoccupied with business. A second thought made the merchant pick up the offending paper, fold it hastily, and drop it into his pocket. His movements had not been observed by any of the clerks, for the cashier's desk stood in a recess framed off from the rest, and forming a kind of inner office.

A betting-list from one of the well-known sporting agents, exhibiting pencil-marks scored against the names of some of the horses—this was what Daniel Cawton had found. How miserably he had been mistaken in the promis-



ing young man whom, almost unconsciously, he had been exalting into a model, if this was the bent of his inclination, and the chosen pursuit of his leisure hours. Why had he not acted with his usual caution, and investigated his character more closely, before placing him in his present position of trust, which might prove an ordeal of temptation too strong for him to bear? He could not pursue this thread of thought, which was becoming painfully exciting; he only asked himself if the youth was so far gone in his wretched infatuation that he was content even to risk the loss of his situation; for it was well known the turf was one of Daniel Crawton's aversions, and that he was so strongly opposed to every form of gambling, that he would refuse to employ any one whom he even suspected of such tendencies. It was almost certain that Hugh had been made aware of his rigid views on the subject, and was, therefore, acting with full knowledge of the consequences which were likely to follow.

"I will not rest until I have sifted this matter to the root," he said sternly, to himself, as he strode on to his private office, whither he was followed by Mark. He came in with his creeping step, his face still wearing the preoccupied, business look. He was met by the short, sharp query, "Did you tell me that Hugh Crawton had gone round to the bank?"

"I did."

"When do you expect him back?"

"In about a quarter of an hour: he is generally punctual."

"I must see him before he sits down to his desk."

Mark glanced aside at the moody, contracted brow, and asked, with some hesitation, "Is there any thing wrong with Cousin Hugh?"

His question was met by another, "Why do you ask?"

"Because, from your manner of mentioning his name, I feared your displeasure pointed to him."

"That will depend upon his own vindication. Until I have it, it will not be just to him in his absence to give or seek information about this matter, which most people would count a trifle, and ridicule what they would call my puritanical strictness. Be that as it may, I have my crotchets; this touches one of them. Now, Mark, about those bills of consignment. I am ready for business, and at your service for the next twenty minutes."

Mark said nothing; he was too good a tactician not to know how to take his cue.

Just five minutes beyond the time specified as the duration of Hugh's absence, Daniel Crawton consulted his gold repeater, then rang the bell. It was promptly answered.

"Is Mr. Hugh in the office?"

"He has just come in, sir."

"Tell him that he is wanted here."

A few seconds, and Hugh Crawton appeared; wondering a little at his unexpected summons, but believing it referred only to business, he was

not prepared for his uncle's manner of receiving him. Something in the look of the stern face troubled him with a sense of vague uneasiness. He glanced at Mark for explanation, but the smooth, pale face betrayed nothing; he seemed immersed in his papers. But if Hugh had been suspicious, he might have fancied that he avoided meeting his eyes. He was not left long in doubt; it was not Daniel Crawton's habit to delay the doing of a disagreeable duty, or trifle with a wound which he had to probe. Without any preliminary he took the paper from his pocket-book, and spread it before the young man, saying, "Of course you recognize this."

It was not easy to escape the steady gaze of those remarkable eyes, sufficient in themselves to disconcert the self-possession of any culprit conscious of wrong-doing. How intently he watched the young face! not a muscle could have moved, nor a shadow passed, without his detection. It was that moment which revealed to him how deep was his own interest in the question, and its bearing on the character of Hugh Crawton—then that he realized what keen pain it would cost him, to find his trust shaken. "To doubt once, will be to doubt always. I would give much to be sure the lad has nothing to do with that betting-paper. But why do I feel like this about Robert's son?" These were the words which the man of iron will crushed back unspoken. His face relaxed nothing of its sternness as he waited for Hugh to speak, keenly anxious, as though his own sentence of condemnation hung upon the answer, and it would reflect upon his own proud honor to discover that his nephew was in any slight thing below the standard at which he had rated him.

One glance was enough for Hugh. It supplied him with the key to all that he had found strange in his uncle's manner. He understood at once why he had been summoned. There was a hot rush of color to his face, and his sensitive mouth trembled, for the implied doubt had stung him. When he could command his voice, he said, "No, sir, I do not recognize this paper, for I see it now for the first time."

"What! are you afraid to admit the ownership?"

The question was asked with a cynical curl of the mouth. But something of the merchant's own spirit flamed out in Hugh's scornful repudiation of his words, in the instant flash of his eyes and the quiver of his mouth, as he uttered the words—

"Afraid, sir; for what reason?"

"Because of the imputation which the possession of such papers may attach to you; for doubtless you are aware that I do not tolerate sporting gentlemen."

"Yes, sir, I am aware of it; but I am not likely to transgress, as I have no sporting tendencies."

"Then how do you account for keeping in your drawer a betting-list, which to judge from the pencil-marks has been attentively studied?"

"In my drawer, sir! Will you please to explain?"

"Willingly. I went this morning to look for an entry in one of your cash-books, and saw this hanging from your drawer. It chanced that I caught sight of something that made me examine further. When I found what the paper was, I felt myself justified in taking it into my possession, as I would not have a doubt remain on my mind, and let it pass without giving you the chance of an explanation. And now, both as your employer and your uncle, I bid you deal with me honestly. Cover nothing, but out with the truth, even if it tell against yourself. I could forgive many shortcomings in a young man, if he owned them frankly; but as you value my good opinion, Hugh Crawton, never give me occasion to distrust your word, nor let me know you stoop to the meanness of a lie, for I hold that to be a lasting stain on a man's honor."

The grand martial face was never more striking than at that moment. Neither of the young men was prepared for the outburst; even Mark had never seen the old man so deeply moved. All the passionate fire of his youth seemed to have come back; but Hugh did not quail before him.

"So far, I have done nothing to forfeit your confidence, sir, and I trust my word will be taken with regard to that paper. I repeat that I never saw it until now, and can not account for its being in my drawer."

"It may have been lent to you," put in the soft tones of Mark Danson.

Hugh turned on him in haughty surprise, repeating, "Lent! how could that be? I have just said that I never saw the paper before, and you know that I have no betting transactions to make it of use to me."

Mark laughed. "Yes, of course, I am supposed to know all your private affairs. Be calm, Hugh," he continued, in a whisper, "I only threw in that suggestion by way of helping you through."

"Was your drawer locked this morning?" Daniel Crawton asked, abruptly.

"I believe not, sir."

The merchant turned to Mark. "Are you aware of any one among the clerks who would take a liberty with Mr. Crawton's drawer in his absence, and lend him this paper without his knowledge?"

He looked steadily at his nephew, and laid emphasis on the word "lend," but Mark parried it with success, and replied, coolly, "I do not know one among our fellows who would do such a trick against Hugh."

"Neither do I; still it could not have got into the drawer without some hand. It is a mystery which we must leave for the present."

"But in the mean time, sir, do you hold me clear from suspicion?" asked Hugh, sturdily.

"I do, unless some new proof should arise against you."

This was the answer with which impetuous Hugh was obliged to be satisfied.

A strange business," said Mark, as he linked his arm in his cousin's and walked with him down the street; "strange, for I can not see how you can have any enemies about the place."

"Mark," said the other, stopping short, "I did not quite understand your tone just now in the office, it seemed as though you were seeking to trip me up with my own words."

"Pugh! my dear boy; you got excited like the governor, and could not take words in their own meaning."

"Ah, well, perhaps I did."

So ended that morning, memorable as the first break in the prosperity of Hugh Crawton. When the cloud passed, the sky seemed clear as usual. But the first link had been forged in the chain of suspicion which was beginning to wind itself about him; and the undermining process was at work upon the fair fabric of a good man's honor, which it was seeking to crumble down into a ruin to be trodden Under Foot.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### "ON THE TRACK."

"Yes, I am right; this is the street: I remember I followed him to that corner, when I had the good luck to spy him out in the 'bus the other night. Let me see, did the old lawyer tell me No. 21? Ah! here it is, down in black and white, for fear my memory should play me a trick. Yes, twenty-one; that must be the house with the three poplars and the dust-colored blinds. I've watched it for the last hour, and haven't seen a soul go in or out. Now for the final move, George; it won't pay you to stop beating round the bush; go in at once, and find out if you're on the track at last."

Thus talking to himself, the man crossed the street, and swung open the gate of No. 21, in which he seemed so deeply interested. It was the last house in a melancholy-looking terrace, and was favored with a larger share of garden than had been allotted to its neighbors. The individual (who the reader will have guessed was Lawyer Markham's strange client) stood on the steps with his hands in his pockets, whistling softly, and mentally taking his position. There was considerable improvement in his appearance; to judge from externals, he was on better terms with society, and had not drifted so far down from respectable life. The unkempt mass of hair had been cared for, and the ragged mustache carefully cut and trimmed to be more in keeping with his dress, which was that of a respectable city clerk. All these changes made it difficult to believe his identity with the slouching, disreputable-looking creature burrowing in the wretched attic like an animal in its kennel. Associates of his own type would have said that "he was in luck." His own opinion on the subject was equivocal. He had made the most of the money doled out to him by the cautious lawyer, and set himself

seriously to work at the apparently hopeless task which he had made the pursuit of his life for the last two or three years—the search for Colonel Rivers's lost son. This was the grand speculation on whose failure or success depended all his hopes of future profit.

While his loud ring is sounding through the house, and he stands on the step waiting the opening of the door with the cool confidence of an habitual visitor of the house, we will leave him to follow when he can, and forestall him by stepping at once into the studio of Charles Marston, who sat before his easel, brush in hand, placidly unconscious of the visit with which he was about to be honored. He expected no one that afternoon. These were his working hours, during which he made it a rule to see no visitors that he could possibly avoid.

"Yes, that will do, a few more touches and I shall have Margaret's face looking at me from the canvas. I wonder if she will recognize herself as my 'Guardian Naiad of the Strand.' My pale Queen Margaret! She looked peerless among the gay belles at the Royal Academy, and yet her brother Hugh was absurd enough to make comparisons between her and that dark-eyed brunette, his uncle's ward. She was pretty enough; a bright bit of coloring that would have served very well as a study for a pretty gleaner, or a gypsy sketch, but no more to be compared to our Margaret than a wild hedge blossom to a camelia."

Here the artist's soliloquy was cut short by a knock at the door, and the appearance of the servant of the house, with the unwelcome information that "there was a gentleman wanting to see him." His brow contracted, and he threw down his brush, saying, irritably,

"A gentleman at this hour! It is too bad, Martha, after the strict orders I have given about afternoon visitors. Why did you not say I was engaged?"

"So I did, sir, over and over, but it ain't no use. He said his business was urgent, and he must see you. I don't think he's ever been here before."

"Did he send up a card?"

"No, sir; but he gave me this," said the girl, handing an envelope, on which was written, in a bold, decided hand, "George Bland, Esq."

"George Bland," he repeated, musingly; "don't remember the name at all. Well, I suppose I must see this troublesome stranger whoever he is; but it's a tremendous nuisance. I would as soon be robbed of my money as my time. You may show him up, Martha; but, mind, not in here; I will see him in my sitting-room."

It was in no amiable mood, that Charles Marston went to meet his unexpected visitor. The sitting-room communicated with the studio by folding-doors, and was furnished in the usual lodging-house style. Mr. Bland was already seated, and evidently disposed to make himself at home. He rose as the door opened; the

artist bowed stiffly, and coldly invited him to resume his seat. The artist's manner told that he was not very favorably impressed by Mr. Bland, whom he failed to recognize as the man who had politely given place to him in Mr. Markham's office, and waited while he held his interview with the lawyer.

"Mr. Marston, I presume?"

"Yes; that is my name. May I ask to what I am indebted for this visit?"

"To your rising fame as an artist," returned the visitor, in a tone that seemed to carry conviction of its sincerity.

It was a fine stroke of tact, and did its work as it was intended; few would have been insensible to the subtle flattery; Charles Marston absorbed it in the most natural manner. The result was that he rapidly thawed, and corrected his first hasty judgment of the stranger, who he began to discover was a very gentlemanly fellow, who deserved to be treated, at least, with civility.

George Bland noted the effect, and was reassured. He knew that he had made a breach, and could carry the siege when he pleased.

"Yes," he continued, keeping his peculiar eyes fixed on the young artist, while his fingers were busy with the fastening of a small leather case, from which he took something folded in tissue paper; "I repeat, it is the name which you are winning in your profession that first led me to hope I might find in you the skill necessary to execute what I require—that is, if you would be willing to undertake the work, which can only be done by a master hand."

"Let me see the work," said Charles, the last shade of his ill-humor now thoroughly dispelled. He was becoming interested in the stranger, whose last words had completed his conquest.

"Here it is, Mr. Marston; a valuable heirloom, which the owner wishes to have copied, in case of accident, or loss to the original, of which it must be a fac-simile."

As he spoke, Mr. Bland handed to the artist a miniature in ivory, representing the face of a female, about twenty-four years of age, not strikingly beautiful, but very delicate and fair—one of those tender, sensitive faces, that carry with them the impression of untimely fading and early death.

The stranger rested his hands on his knees, and bent his head forward, watching the face of the artist with an eagerly expectant look, as though keenly anxious for the success of his negotiation; but it was not to be supposed that he was quite prepared for the extraordinary effect which the sight of the miniature produced upon Charles Marston.

He started, changed color, and uttered some incoherent exclamations. "Why—what—how is this?" and, as if doubting the evidence of his eyes, he held up the picture to the light, his hand shaking, and his manner unaccountably agitated.

"You look ill, Mr. Marston; can I get you

any thing?" and George Bland came forward, officious in his solicitude.

"Thank you; no; it is nothing," replied the other, hastily; "only I was foolish enough to allow myself to get excited by what appears to me a very singular similarity between this likeness and one in my own possession; but, after all, it may only exist in my own fancy. We dreamers, who live much in the sphere of imagination, are not always accountable for the tricks which it may play off upon us."

Mr. Bland laughed, showing a set of well-preserved white teeth.

"Excuse me, Mr. Marston; but it seems to me unlikely that the similarity would strike you so forcibly unless there was some foundation. My advice is, convince yourself at once by comparing the two. Is yours a miniature of the same size?"

"No, it is set in a locket; but, though on a smaller scale, the face seems to me exactly the same. But, tell me, is yours a portrait or merely a fancy sketch?"

"A portrait."

"Is the original living?"

"No; I believe the lady has been dead many years."

Mr. Bland watched the effect of the communication, but the face of the artist showed no sign of awakened interest or curiosity. Perhaps he did not believe in the identity of the portraits.

At the mention of a locket, a quick gleam of intelligence had flashed across the stranger's face, and he could scarcely conceal his satisfaction when Charles Marston asked, "Would you like to see my locket?"

"Yes, if you have no objection; for I confess I am rather curious to know if your imagination really has played you a trick in this instance."

The artist replied by unlocking a writing-desk, from which he brought out a small jewel-case, containing, among other valuables, a plain gold locket, which he handed to him, saying, "There it is, and the miniature; let us compare the two."

But Mr. Bland was examining the workmanship of the locket, pressing the edges with his fingers and scanning it curiously, as though doubtful about the quality of the gold. Before the wondering artist had time to speak, he touched a concealed spring, and disclosed a second opening beneath the portrait, showing two locks of hair plaited together, and underneath, the initials D. R. and C. E. R.; the whole so ingeniously contrived, that it was almost impossible to detect it without some knowledge of the secret. No sooner had he made the discovery, than the man's manner changed.

"Found—found!" he exclaimed, excitedly, waving his hand; "my instincts have not misled me. Who will say now that I have entered on a wild-geese chase for what I shall never find?"

"Sir—sir, what is the meaning of all this?" began Charles, in some perturbation, fearing that

his visitor was under the influence of some mental malady.

"Give me time, and you shall know all. You are wondering how I became acquainted with the secret of that spring, but it shall be explained; and with regard to the likeness, before I put them together I know that they are both portraits of the same person."

"I don't see how that can be possible," replied the bewildered artist.

"Wait, and I will show you. But first, can you tell me who this lady was?"

"No; I can not."

"Then I will, as I chance to be better informed. These are the portraits of the first wife of Colonel Rivers. They were taken at the same time, one to be placed in a miniature for her husband, and the other in a locket for her little son. The boy wore it round his neck, when an unknown enemy, for revenge upon his father, stole him from his inheritance and his name. This is the locket, I could swear; there is not another answering its description."

"What am I to understand?" gasped Charles, in much agitation. "I have some vague remembrances that seem to fit in with your strange story."

"That is very likely," added Bland, "and helps to confirm my own suspicion that it is you I have been seeking from the time I left Calcutta."

Charles seized his arm. "Quick! don't trifle with me, but tell me at once. Who are you, and what more do you know about that likeness and locket?"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE MISSING CHECK.

"ROYTON, send Hugh Crawton to me."

"Yes, sir."

The merchant stood at his desk with an open letter before him. His brows were knitted heavily over his eyes, and he spoke in his sternest manner. No wonder that Giles Royton looked crushed; he had just come in to ask some business question. He ventured to linger a moment on the threshold, and said, timidly, "What are my orders about those invoices, sir?"

"They must wait until I am disengaged. Send Hugh Crawton here, as I requested you, and understand that I will see no one until I ring."

He bent his head over the letter on his desk, and the clerk went out, muttering to himself, "This bodes no good to Mr. Hugh; I'm afraid there's an ill wind blowing for him."

A few minutes later, Hugh Crawton stood by the merchant's desk, his heart beating a little quicker than usual, and his color slightly heightened. He remembered the occasion of his last peremptory summons to his uncle's office; not that he associated that time with the present,

but as he recalled it, an indefinable sense of trouble fell upon him. Yet now, as then, he held up his head erect and fearless, and met the stern look of inquiry without a shadow in his clear eyes.

Standing thus, young Hugh Crawton certainly did not look an object for suspicion. Perhaps his uncle thought so, and it gave him a certain sense of relief; for deep down in his heart there were latent feelings towards Hugh—the son so like his mother—feelings that never showed upon the surface, and were suspected by none except Mark Danson, whose jealous hate had already divined them. But the merchant's manner relaxed none of its severity, and there was no softening in the look so steadily fixed on the young man's face. He began abruptly, "You remember Lever and Balderstone's account with our firm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me the date on which they closed it for the last half-year."

There could not have been a doubt that Hugh's look of astonishment was genuine, as he said, hastily, "This must be a mistake; they have not closed, for I have a debit of £200 against them, brought forward to their current account."

"Impossible, Hugh Crawton! you can not have forgotten that you signed this receipt, which I have received, in a letter, this morning at Broombank;—or are you prepared to deny that the handwriting is your own?"

Yes, it was there; an acknowledgment of a check for £200, signed by himself on behalf of the firm. Almost doubting the evidence of his senses, Hugh gazed at the signature in painful bewilderment. The whole business was a dark mystery, through which he could not see his way.

Daniel Crawton was the first to speak. "You will see that it has been applied for again, and this is their reply; it is well that the honor of this house is above suspicion; but this is a strange business, and must be sifted to the bottom, for it either involves gross negligence and mismanagement, or worse—" He paused an instant, and then added the ominous words, which seemed to ring through the quiet office, inexorably sharp and distinct, "Embezzlement and fraud."

The young man started, repeating, in a voice hoarse with agitation, "Embezzlement—fraud! By whom?"

"That remains for you to answer."

Hugh's face whitened, and for a moment his courage nearly gave way. It seemed as though a mine had been sprung beneath his feet, just when he believed himself to be securely treading his way to prosperity and an honorable position. No wonder that his heart swelled, and he seemed to be looking through a sudden mist up to the face so rigidly turned against him. Then came the needful reaction of feeling, and the rebound of the brave, fearless spirit, which saved him from breaking down.

"Embezzlement—fraud." Whatever they

made out against him, his conscience was clear there. He knew that he had done his duty, and could look even Daniel Crawton in the face, when it came to a question of innocence or guilt; so he swallowed the choking lump in his throat and crushed out the look of agony from his face, that he might be prepared to do his master's bidding, when the stern command was given—

"Produce your cash-books for the current and the past half-year."

Hugh's brow cleared. Secure in his own sense of integrity and right-dealing, he did not shrink from an examination of his books; for he had no doubt that they would clear up the unaccountable mistake, and furnish at once his answer and vindication. On his way back to the office, he passed Giles Royton, who looked after him with a wistful, apprehensive look, that it was, perhaps, well that Hugh did not see; for he would need all his courage and self-possession to meet the ordeal that awaited him.

Daniel Crawton, watching him narrowly, as he entered, made his own comment about his manner. "Is this confidence real or assumed? it must be either ignorance, or callous defiance of detection."

Hugh stood before the desk turning over the leaves, his eyes bright and eager, and his face growing hot with excitement. "Here is the entry, sir, proving that Lever and Balderstone's account has not been closed."

The merchant looked over the young man's shoulder, and read for himself. "Now turn to their account in the old cash-book," he said, coldly.

Hugh obeyed, and there, to his utter surprise and bewilderment, stood the balance closed, in his own handwriting, with the £200 entered as paid.

"How do you account for this discrepancy?" asked the merchant, eying him keenly.

"I can not account for it, sir; but I do know that I never received the money; that is why it is brought forward to their present account."

"But here is evidence that you can not break down; for your own figures give a point-blank contradiction to your words. Better own to a mistake, or a fault of negligence, than persist in a denial that only complicates the business, and gives it a suspicious aspect. Now let me see if it has been paid into the bank."

The book was produced, but no such entry could be found. A darker shadow fell on the merchant's face, and the stern mouth set into harder lines; though Hugh Crawton stood there knowing his own innocence, and though his conscience acquitted him of any act or intent of wrong towards his employer, his color paled, and his heart sunk under the look that flashed upon him from beneath those lowered eyebrows, and when his uncle spoke, the tone of his inexorable, pitiless voice left behind a dull heartache, that remained with him for many days.

"Our next question is, what has become of the missing check?"

It was only by a strong effort that Hugh man-

agreed to keep his voice firm, as he replied, "I can only answer that it never passed through my hands."

"Yet here is your own signature as proof to the contrary; you must be aware that you alone are responsible in this case."

"Yes, sir, I am aware."

"Then why this abuse of confidence? You have been unwisely advanced over the heads of old and experienced clerks, and promoted to a position of trust, without due test of your fitness; that error and injustice were mine, misled by foolish impulse and a rash credit of appearances, that you now repay by making me ashamed of my relationship, which, from this day, I shall ignore, unless you can clear yourself better than by denials, that prove nothing, and falsehood—"

"Stop, sir," interrupted Hugh, goaded almost to desperation, and forgetting, for the moment, that it was Daniel Crawton whom he was addressing; "words like those are arrows that poison where they sting, and may do harm that nothing can repair. I deny the charge of falsehood; those who know me best never yet had occasion to doubt my word. With regard to that check, I have said nothing but the truth, which I would swear to if I stood here on oath; for even if I were guilty, it is not in me to make use of such a mean cover."

There was an eager, yearning look on Daniel Crawton's face, and the muscles about his mouth worked for an instant. Some hidden sympathy had responded to that bold speech. It was thus that he would have looked and spoken, if they could have changed places. It was not the first time that he had recognized a likeness to himself in young Hugh Crawton. There was a scarcely perceptible break in his voice, as he said, "Would that I could believe this, Hugh, even if you were not a Crawton; I would give much to know that you leave this room cleared from suspicion."

At that moment his glance fell upon the receipt, which still lay on the desk; the practical business proof, which there was nothing to refute but mere verbal denials, unsupported by other testimony. It was not enough to satisfy the truth-loving soul of Daniel Crawton, or meet the requirements of his rigid code in matters of business integrity. Again he distrusted, and the hard look came back; it seemed as if a barrier had been suddenly raised between them.

Hugh felt the quick change in his manner when he spoke. "It is my wish to spare you a public exposure of this strange affair; but as it will be impossible, under present circumstances, to retain you, I shall require you to settle your accounts, and render up your current cash."

"It shall be done at once, sir."

A few minutes later, Hugh had delivered to his master the cash-box and key, saying, proudly, "Please to count this money, now."

He stood looking on with burning cheeks and heaving breast; his heart aching at the thought of his mother, and the misery he would carry home that day.

At last he was startled by an exclamation from his uncle. "How is this? I find a deficiency of twenty pounds!"

"Twenty pounds!" gasped Hugh; "that cannot be; you must have overlooked it, sir; I could swear that it was correct when I locked the box last night."

"Then it is hardly likely that it can have escaped; you held the key in your keeping, and no other opens the box except my own. Ah! what have we here?"

On lifting the inner part of the box, he had displaced an unsealed letter, which he took up, dropping out a crisp bank-note; it was the missing twenty pounds. To complete the blighting evidence of his nephew's guilt, he read aloud the address on the letter; it was that of a well-known betting firm. A look of keen pain passed over the old man's face; at that moment he was tearing Hugh Crawton from his heart, in a great wrench that would, perhaps, take with it all his softest feelings. In his agitation, he clutched the edge of the box, and some of its gold rolled out on the floor with a sharp ring.

It was some minutes before he found voice to speak. "What does your conscience say to this? Perjury, fraud, theft! Leave—leave me, boy, before I deliver you up to the law you have outraged, and forget that you are my good old father's grandson."

Hugh said nothing; he had dropped into a chair, where he sat gazing at his uncle, with pale, set features, a picture of mental agony, carved in stone.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### AT HOME.

It was late when Hugh Crawton reached home, for he had wandered aimlessly through the streets, and lingered on his way because he shrank from taking his sore heart and haggard face into his mother's presence, and wounding her gentle spirit with the miserable story of his expulsion and disgrace. It was not the mere fact of being thrown out of employment—not that he feared to live over again his past experience, bitter as it was, and go back to poverty, the daily fret and harass of disappointment in the hard struggle of those who seek in vain for leave to toil; he was willing to face all that, for it was something that he could fight through and hope to conquer by the help of cheerful courage and faith in himself. But the present crush had fallen like a blight on his young head; to feel himself cast off with a brand upon his character, a mark for the finger of suspicion to point at, with the additional stigma of base ingratitude to the friend who had pushed his fortunes, the friend of all others whom he held in deepest reverence and respect. "Perjury, fraud, theft!" The words seemed to have burned into his brain, and the scene in the office returned to him until he grew heartsick with de-

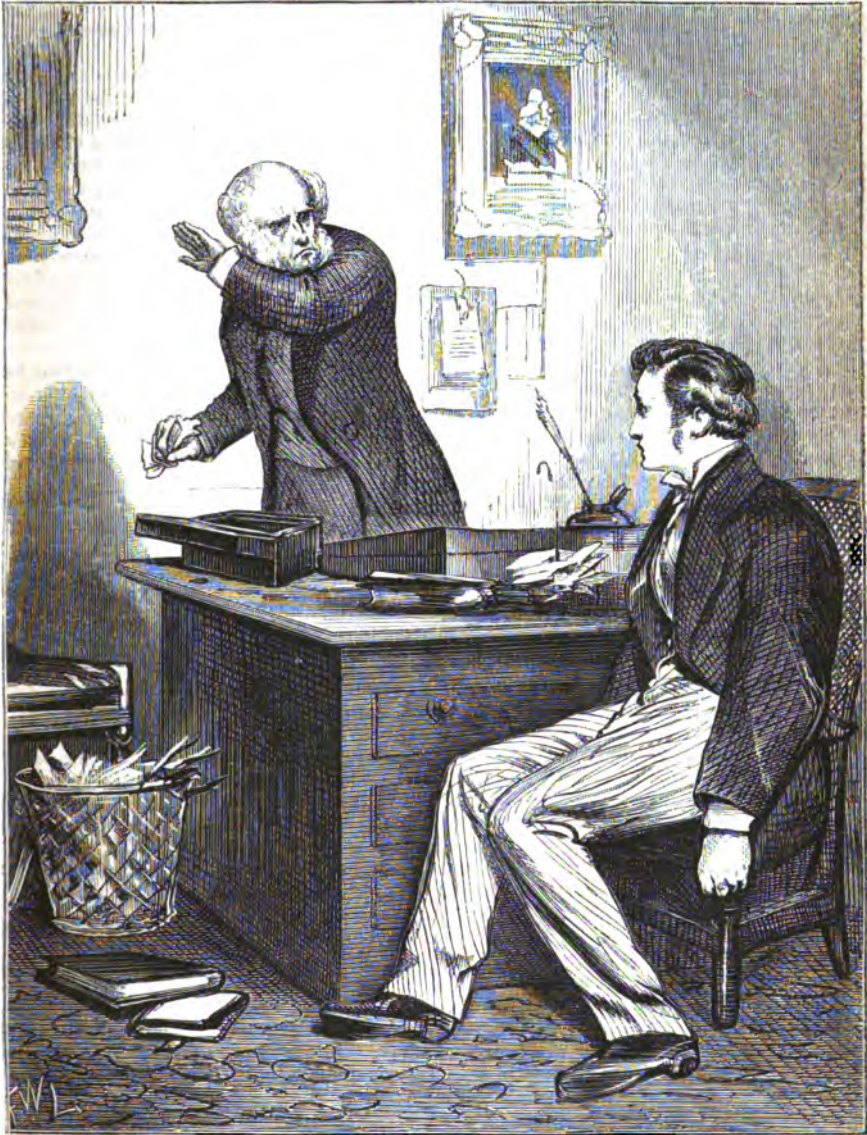


spair. What could he do to turn the tide which had so suddenly overwhelmed him? How could he break the subtle chain of condemning evidence which some unknown enemy had forged for his undoing?

He was almost choking with these thoughts when he groped his way up the steps to his

cious solicitude, the miserable story was not left for Hugh to tell.

"Very painful and mysterious, never occurred before to a Crawton, and of all people poor Hugh seemed the most unlikely to fall under suspicion; but we hope he will soon be cleared. The anger of the governor is some-



"Leave me, boy, before I deliver you up to the law."

mother's door, and pushing silently past Chriss, who as usual had answered his ring, like one seized with sudden faintness, reeled rather than walked into the little parlor where his mother sat alone waiting for him; for the ill news had preceded him: thanks to Mark Danson's offi-

thing dreadful; but Hugh is safe, for it will be kept from the knowledge of the clerks if possible. I should not have known all myself if I had not drawn it from the old man, and I thought it best for Hugh's sake to prepare you."

These were Mark's words when he had done

his evil errand, and let the blow fall on the aching hearts which he left behind. Margaret Crawton had reared her stately head, and turned upon him as though he had been Hugh's accuser, flashing her great eyes in that characteristic manner of hers which he particularly disliked.

"Nothing will make me believe that it is not a base conspiracy from beginning to end; my brother has some secret enemy, too cunning, and perhaps too powerful to be easily found out. It must be left to time, and the great Judge of all men."

Even Mr. Crawton had risen above himself, and found voice to speak out for his son, completely roused for the time from the absorption of his own sick fancies. With a manner that gave new dignity to his tall, shadowy figure, he stood up from the sofa, pulling excitedly at his dressing-gown as he spoke.

"Mark Danson, how dare you come here with that tale against my son? I would have torn out my tongue before I let myself speak such words of any kin of mine. Who is it that accuses him—Daniel Crawton? Let me go to him. Margaret, bring me my coat; we have not met for years, but I must give him back the libel to his face, and make him remember that, though we are poor, we are still as proud and honorable as any of the race."

Here followed a violent fit of coughing, which made the last words nearly inarticulate, and the poor invalid sank back on his sofa, faint and gasping for breath.

In the midst of that scene Mark Danson contrived to make his escape, secretly regretting that he had elected himself the bearer of the evil tidings, for his cousin Margaret's words had a strange trick of recurring to him, and his dreams that night were haunted by the white, sorrow-stricken face of Hugh's mother.

"My boy—my boy!" These were the first words that greeted Hugh when he stepped across the threshold of the quiet little room, where his coming had been watched for with such anxious yearning to share the burden of misery which had so unexpectedly fallen on him. Margaret was in the next room attending her father, who was still ill from the agitation into which he had been thrown by Mark Danson's visit.

It comforted Hugh to find his mother alone. He could come to her with his bruised spirit and lay bare the wound, just as in the by-gone days he had been used to bring to her the burden of his childish griefs. He was struck by something in the tone of her voice, and there was a look in her eyes that showed foreknowledge, how obtained he did not care to ask. All he craved was to cast himself on the loving sympathy which had never yet failed him in the time of need.

She met him as he came in, and taking his hot hands into her soft clasp led him like a child. He sank wearily into the seat placed for him; then the long-pent-up flood of feeling broke

forth, and the spirit which had sustained him in his uncle's presence gave way.

"Oh, mother!" he cried, in a tone whose sharp ring of anguish pierced her heart, "you have enough to bear without this new trouble; I read in your face that you know something of what has passed to-day. Why don't you meet me with reproaches for adding to the burden which was heavy enough before?"

In reply, she parted the brown ripples on his forehead, and soothed him in her own gentle way; but he went on excitedly, catching his breath at intervals in a sort of sob—

"Perhaps you do not yet know the worst: that I am disgraced, expelled from my situation, as one who has forfeited his right to the company of honest men. Do you realize it, mother? There is something wrong with the books, and I am suspected of embezzling two hundred pounds; but that is not all: there was a twenty-pound note missing, and it was found in a letter, in what appeared to be my handwriting, addressed to a betting firm. I could not clear myself, and *he*, my uncle, believes it all; it is only the name of Crawton that has saved me from a prison. This—this, after trying so hard to do my duty! Mother, what will keep me from going mad?"

She answered with solemn sweetness—words that soothed as they fell, like oil cast on the troubled waters. "There is One who hath regard even for the fall of a sparrow, a Father who will not suffer any of his children to be tried beyond their strength. Take this trouble to His footstool, Hugh, and trust where you can not trace His hand; for 'God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.'"

Hugh did not answer, but sat with bowed head, trying to keep his face hidden, that its expression of misery might not be seen by the kind eyes which he felt were watching him with such a world of tender anxiety in their wistful gaze.

"Take courage, Hugh; you need not fear so long as your own conscience acquits you of wrong-doing."

"But the disgrace, mother. How can I hold up my head under this suspicion? They will not take my word against the bewildering mass of proof, so complete in its evidence against me that it confuses even my own knowledge of facts. Daniel Crawton believes me guilty. That thought stings me to the heart; for I can not tell how I value his good opinion. I would have worked day and night in his service only to gain—"

He was interrupted by another gentle whisper: "'As thy day so shall thy strength be.' My boy, it is good for us to pass under the rod sometimes. This trial is sent for some wise end; to teach some lesson that it was needful for you to learn."

As she spoke, her arm crept round his neck, and she raised his drooping face, which gradually calmed under her look, as if it gave him comfort and infused into him some of her own spirit.



Though so unobtrusive in her words and actions, Mrs. Cawton's religion was such a real, practical thing, so much a part of herself and her daily life, that there could be no distrusting the root of the hope which had carried her through so many trials, or question from whence came the influence which gave the delicate, soft-voiced woman such perfect sway over her children and made her such a tower of strength and reliance to those about her.

There was a pause, which neither seemed inclined to break. It was Hugh who at length spoke.

"We have not thought of all the consequences, mother; again out of employment—a burden where I ought to be a help. Father is getting worse, and you and Margaret are overworking yourselves. I know it though you try to hide it from me; then there is the rent."

"Hugh, there is for us the same Hand that fed the widow's cruse of oil. In our deepest poverty we have never been left to starve, and we shall not now."

His lips quivered. "But, mother, I must do something; I can not eat if I do not work. My resolution is taken; if my character is not good enough for the counting-house, and I can not be trusted with a pen and ledger, I will make a conquest of my pride, forget that I am a gentleman's son, and shoulder the laborer's shovel—any thing to gain an honest crust. There is no disgrace in labor."

He seemed to be taking heart from his words, for his eyes brightened and his color came back, as he continued, "God bless you, mother! you have done me good, as you always do. I would strain every nerve if I could only conquer my fate, and force my uncle to retract his words. I told him once that I was willing to begin at the lowest step of the ladder, so that I could raise myself at last; and if I have the chance given me I will do it yet, for I can not believe I was born to live and die under foot."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### CHECK FOR CHECK.

"WELL, Royton, we must have quick decisions and short answers, for we can only count upon three-quarters of an hour before the governor is back again; after that time we shall not be safe. I wanted you yesterday, and as I passed your desk I made a sign for you to follow me into the office; but I suppose you did not see it."

"Yes, I did, Mr. Danson."

"Then why did you not attend to me?"

"Because I could not spare the time."

"You could not!" repeated with a haughty gesture of surprise. "I can scarcely suspect you of intentional insolence, but that sounds to me very much like 'would not.'"

"Perhaps it does, sir; you may say would not, if that pleases you better;" and Giles Roy-

ton, who had, uninvited, helped himself to a seat, went coolly on with his occupation of twisting a strip of paper into a variety of fantastic shapes.

Mark Danson contracted his brows. For the past few days he had been conscious of an inexplicable change in the clerk's manner towards himself—a something wanting, which might have warned him that he was losing what power he might have held over the man's fears and scruples, and that henceforth all show of respect from Eleanor's father would be a mere mockery of their relative positions. Giles Royton saw the dull gleam in his eyes, and the involuntary clench of his hand as he said—

"This to me, Royton! What am I to understand?"

"Any thing you please, sir;" and a sort of derisive smile lurked for an instant round the man's mouth. Mark Danson was enraged beyond all prudence and self-control.

"This is insufferable, fellow! I have borne enough of this kind of insolence from you lately; you are presuming upon my unfortunate connection with your daughter; but you may draw the bow too tight. I warn you that it may be dangerous to provoke me."

The time was past when Mark Danson's anger was an occasion of fear and trembling to his uncle's clerk. The menace in his words fell on unmoved ears; even the sight of his face, almost livid with passion, did not affect that exasperating coolness. He was still smiling when he threw away the twisted strip of paper, and leaned back in his chair, repeating, "Dangerous! I can believe that, taking into account what you have already done in other quarters. I happen to know that you don't always give warning beforehand."

"What do you mean, Royton?"

"I will tell you presently, when you are not so much excited. First come to the business that made you send for me here; ten minutes of the time is gone now," glancing at the time-piece as he spoke.

Mark Danson writhed in his chair. He knew that he had made a false move, and suffered himself to be betrayed into losing his temper, when his policy should have been to conciliate. He was still working to gain possession of the paper which neither persuasion nor threats could induce Eleanor to give up. His last hope rested in her father, and that morning he had expected to receive his final answer. "Fool," he said, mentally—"fool that I was to show my hand so soon! why not wait until I had squeezed the sponge?"

He spoke in a conciliating tone. "Royton, you have brought this upon yourself; you know that I am accustomed to exact and receive all proper respect from my uncle's clerks, and it is not likely that I can in any case forget what is due to my position in the firm."

"Certainly not, sir," acquiesced Giles Royton, in the same cool tone which he had preserved throughout the interview.

The other looked at him suspiciously from under his bent brows. He was painfully in the dark about that alteration of manner of which

he complained, for mixed with the man's dislike, which he now made no attempt to disguise, there was a sting of cool contempt, which chafed him more because it came from a source which he was accustomed to despise. There had been words used, which he recalled with a lurking sense of uneasiness. Perhaps his own conscience had given them a point, for they seemed to imply a double meaning — a knowledge of something which might possibly be turned against himself.

"Five minutes more gone," said Royton, composedly, keeping his eyes fixed on the time-piece. "We have only half an hour now."

"Ah, yes, to be sure—only half an hour. I'm glad you reminded me." And Mark Danson shuffled nervously among some papers on his desk. He had lost his usual self-command, and did not feel himself master of the situation. "Well, Royton, I have waited your own time. When last we talked this over, you agreed to consider my proposal, and try what you could do to influence Eleanor to see where her real interest lay. As I expect, you have kept faith with me. I sent for this morning to ask if you can give me a decided answer."

"Yes, sir, I can."

Mark leaned forward, his voice sharp and eager, as he said, "Of course she consents to give up the paper, but will she promise, and accept the terms I offer: a comfortable life provision, and ease and happiness for yourself and her in a new land, until circumstances enable me to acknowledge her?"

Giles Royton was generally slow of speech and movement. Mark breathed an anathema on the sluggish tongue, and in his impatience would like to have shaken the words from him. They came at last: "No doubt a liberal offer on your side, and very kind of you to think of saving us trouble, and packing us off so snugly out of every body's way; but there's no law for ruling the obstinacy of women, and your wife happens to be one who makes up her mind for once and all. She refuses to promise any thing, and her message to you is, that she asks nothing but what it is right you should give."

"And the paper," struck in Mark, almost breathless with suppressed rage, and the excitement which he found it so hard to govern.

"She will not give it up."

"And you have failed to get it from her."

"Yes."

"Then you have miserably bungled the affair, as I might have foreseen. Why did you not use other means, as I suggested? You surely knew which was her private drawer, and might have borrowed her keys without her knowledge."

"You mean that I, her father, should have sneaked into her chamber like a thief, and stolen her papers."

"Yes, if you will take that ugly view of a little harmless transaction. I say, if she is blind to her own advantage, you have a right to act for her."

"I'm not sure that it is for her advantage; but even if it was, I could not bring myself to

play that thief's trick on my child. I could never look Nelly in the face again."

"Sentimental rubbish!" sneered Mark.

"You led me to believe that you took a sensible view of the matter, and would aid me to the best of your power. I see now that you have been playing me double."

"And if I have," replied Royton quietly, "can you wonder that, being so long associated with a master-hand at the game like yourself, I try to emulate you now and then?"

Mark Danson turned fiercely upon him. "Look here, Royton, if you value your place you will keep civil. Not to waste time in talk that will only make things worse between us, tell me if you have counted the cost, and taken into account the possible result of this obstinacy of your daughter."

"That is easily done, Mr. Danson. As Eleanor will not resign her claim (and even your uncle could not blame her for that), you will be compelled to acknowledge your marriage."

"Never, Giles Royton! I could not, if I had the wish; for my proud old uncle would never forgive the ruse which I have practised to hide this wretched secret, besides the disgrace of such a marriage. For me, his adopted son and successor, to give him as a niece the daughter of one of the least respectable among his clerks—a gambler!"

He almost hissed out the last word, which he flung defiantly at his listener, as something that would hit and hurt. It did both. A deadly paleness came over Giles Royton's face, and with it a strange, pained look.

"Gambler!" he muttered to himself; "that is true enough: it has drained my money, and kept me down. But, Nelly, this is something new." He rose to his feet, and stood before the master's desk, stooping his shoulders like one who already began to feel his age. Standing thus, with the light falling on his thin gray hair, something of the old deprecating manner seemed to have come back; but now there was another look, a new expression, that made it seem any thing but a feeble face. Mark Danson took silent note of him. He spoke in a changed voice: "Is this true, sir? Am I the bar between you two? Is it because she belongs to me that you are ashamed to acknowledge Nelly?"

The answer was an evasion: "You might have known that long ago."

The clerk shifted his position, making a slight shuffling noise with his feet. He had turned away his face, gazing through the dull office window with a wistful far-off look, that took in poor Eleanor in the shabby little house in Islington, and went back over the stream of years to the time when she was a child. He talked as if to himself: "Poor Nelly! I never guessed that I was the clog that kept her down. I shall find it hard to bear till I am used to it, but my years can't be many, and she has to live when I am dead." He turned again to Mark. "I have made up my mind, sir. If you will claim your wife, and try to make up for past neglect,

I will give her up—never ask to see her except at a distance, or go away altogether if you would like it better. It need never be known who was her father; and, for the rest, she will be as much a lady as any of them."

Mark Danson stared blankly at the speaker, whose words were giving the vexed subject a turn which he had not expected, and could not comprehend in his own selfish skepticism. If he had had any latent faith in the better part of human nature, and there had been any chord of feeling to be stirred into sympathy with what was good and true, he could not but have been moved by that touch of diviner nature working in Giles Royton—the one redeeming impulse that was capable of lifting him up from moral degradation to the virtue of a great self-sacrifice, which had in it no alloy of worldly motive.

Without waiting to be answered, he went on ruffling his scanty hair like one who did not quite know what he did, with the look of old age showing more plainly on him. "Yes, sir, I will cast myself off from Nelly; give her entirely to you and your world, and keep myself always out of her way and yours. I will do it for her sake, and ask nothing—only your word that you will be a true husband to her."

But Mark Danson met the passionate appeal with unmoved eyes. "You talk of what is impossible," he said, hastily. "Nothing that you can do would keep it from being known that I had married out of my sphere. I tell you it can not be done."

"Which means that you will not do her justice."

"Yes, if you call it so. I mean that I can not now present your daughter to the world as Mrs. Danson."

"Then you are a greater villain than I took you for, even when—" He stopped abruptly, and left the sentence unfinished.

Mark watched the hardening face, wondering at the revulsion of feeling which he read there. "If she would only consent to my arrangement, which would settle every thing so comfortably," he murmured.

"She will not," said the father, fiercely; "and if it rests with me, she shall not!"

"Then you are reckless of the ruin which will fall upon yourself?"

"Yes; reckless of any hurt that you can do me, for I happen to hold a check against you, and fear goes farther than any thing with cowards."

"What, fellow! you shall repent this."

"Wait, sir; I have not quite said my say."

As Giles Royton spoke, he came closer to him, and whispered, "I hold proof that you are a forger!"

Those words were potent enough to make Mark Danson start as if he had been stung, and leave him cowed and trembling, gazing with a kind of abject terror into the face of the man who had spoken them.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### END OF THE SEARCH.

"THERE, Mr. Artist," concluded George Bland, with an air of relief, secretly gratified as he watched the flushed, eager face of his auditor; "at last the burden is off my mind. I have told what I had to tell, and fulfilled the mission that brought me from Calcutta. I don't scruple to own that I've done it under difficulties. If it hadn't been that I took it upon me at his death-bed, I should have been tempted to throw the thing up many times, when I've been hard pressed; but I happen to have some pluck, and can cut up pretty tough in my way when I set myself to do a thing—and I think there is something to be gained by it," he might have added, but did not, preferring for the present to keep out of sight the sordid aspect of the question, and endeavor to give the artist a rather heroic cast of his character.

It suited him to try to confirm the favorable impression which he fancied he had already produced, for in Charles Marston his instincts told him that he was dealing with a character of a far different type to the phlegmatic, cautious Lawyer Markham, whom he began to regard as a disagreeable necessity in the business, and one likely to prove an unpleasant check on the future generosity of the heir. His convictions were strong on the one point of his success. He believed that he had come to the end of his search, and really discovered the missing son of Colonel Rivers.

"And you say you can vouch for the truth of this strange history?" said Charles, nervously examining, by turns, the locket and miniature which he held in his hands.

"Every word. I have only given you the simple statement of facts, just as it was confided to me."

"Yet it seems so unreal. I could rather fancy it a leaf out of a romance, than any thing that has occurred in actual life."

George Bland smiled softly as he said, "I hope soon to see you in possession of what will make it all pleasantly real, Mr. Rivers."

Charles started as his visitor gave him the new name.

"To-morrow I shall almost fancy I have been dreaming all this, it seems so hard to realize. You a stranger, of whom I had not the slightest knowledge, come upon me suddenly, and make revelations which, if true, disclose a strange incident in my life, and draw back the veil which has hitherto hidden the past from me, and will entail new duties, new relations, and—"

"Better than all, a new future, as the heir of Colonel Rivers's wealth," interrupted Mr. Bland, filling in the sentence.

"But it requires more proof," said Charles, thoughtfully regarding the miniature. "If I know any thing of Mr. Markham, I should say he is too much a man of the world, and too

shrewd a lawyer, to take up a case out of mere suppositions, or recognize a nephew from what may be only a chance resemblance between two portraits; even with my slender stock of legal knowledge, I know that a claim supported by no better foundation than this would fall to the ground at once."

is not so easy to have patience when a fine fortune is held in the balance."

"Never mind the fortune," said Charles, a little irritably. "The first consideration is, am I fairly entitled to it? for I would not lend myself to any thing unjust or dishonorable to gain three times the amount of Colonel Rivers's



"I hold proof that you are a forger."

"Quite true, Mr. Rivers. I give you that name feeling sure it is yours by right, and that we shall be able to prove it to the satisfaction of all concerned."

"But how, Mr. Bland?"

"Patience, and you shall see, though I own it

wealth, whatever that may be; if I lose it, I shall not be any poorer than I was before, and the disappointment will not kill me."

"I call that the philosophy of genius," retorted Mr. Bland, with a covert sneer in his words, "which I can admire but not imitate."

I fear I am too fond of riches; but then I am not gifted, and I don't paint pictures."

Charles knitted his brow, and gave the speaker a flash from his dark eyes which warned him that he was in danger of going too far. Mr. Bland instantly changed his tone, and became serious.

"Excuse me, sir, I was inclined to laugh at your doubts, because I have no fear of the case, which rests entirely on the question of your identity with the child who was stolen from his nurse in India, more than twenty years ago. I have reason to believe that it can be clearly proved. You will wonder what led me to seek you out from the crowds of young men in London. I will tell you, but first I have a request to make: have you any objection to let me examine your left wrist."

"None whatever," replied Charles, baring it for his inspection; "but it's rather an odd fancy of yours, and I shall expect to be further enlightened on the subject."

George Bland was holding his wrist, and examining it with an air of curious attention, tracing with his finger the intersecting blue lines that marked the veins. But while he looked, the smiling, self-satisfied face suddenly clouded, and after a few seconds he dropped it with a look of blank disappointment, muttering, "No trace here, yet he said it would be certain to show, for he would carry it to his grave."

"What do you mean?" interrogated the artist, rearranging his coat-sleeve. "And what is it you are so anxious to find on my wrist?"

"The trace of a scar or seam, as from a deep cut." Mr. Bland spoke in a tone of vexation. "It would not be of so much account, but from what the old lawyer tells me, it was made known when the boy was lost as one of the signs by which he was to be recognized. It seems that while the Colonel was in England with his son, after his wife's death, young Rivers nearly killed himself by a fall from a window on to some glass frames in the garden; that's old Markham's version, it's no matter now, only we want the trace of the scar."

"Is it any thing like this?" asked Charles, uncovering his right arm, and displaying a faint red line across his wrist.

Mr. Bland uttered an exclamation. "It was my mistake; he must have told me the right instead of the left wrist, and I am not deceived after all. Now Lawyer Markham may be told that his nephew is found, and before long I hope to congratulate you on coming into your own."

The artist's face flushed. "I knew there was something strange about my history, when he whom I had been taught to love as my father told me, on his dying bed, that I had no real right to the name of Marston, and was only his son by adoption. He had shrunk from telling me before, because he wished me to regard him as a parent. He confessed that a great wrong had been done me—not by himself, but another, whom he did not name; further than that I know nothing. It was then that he placed in

my hands the locket, which I remembered wearing when a boy."

"Have you other recollections of that time?" queried Mr. Bland, eagerly.

"Nothing" but fragments, disconnected like broken dreams; sometimes I recall a garden with a fountain, and a pale, beautiful lady lying on a low couch propped with pillows; but that seems to me so far back, and the impression is so dimly defined, that I can not tell whether it is real, or only something I have seen in a picture. More distinctly, I can remember going in a ship with a tall, kind-looking gentleman, and one or two black men, who must have been his servants, and then there falls across my mind the shadow of a dark-bearded face, with fierce, bright eyes, likely to terrify a child; beyond that all is confused. My adopted father told me that when about six or seven I had a fever which kept me ill for months, perhaps it helped to weaken my memory of the past."

"Just so; but there is proof enough of your identity. No one can raise a doubt that you are the son of Colonel Rivers. Now I will tell you why I sought you out after meeting you in Lawyer Markham's office. First, the name of Marston, which I remembered was that of the English gentleman who was supposed to have adopted you. He was first cousin to the man who was your father's enemy. Then something about your face struck me; I know now that it was a likeness between you and the portrait in the miniature."

"My mother, though I never knew it until to-day," said Charles, in a low voice, adding, as if to himself, "it was cruel to hide it from me all these years; but perhaps it was meant for the best. He gave me a father's care, and left me all he possessed from the wreck of his fortune; and did what he could to atone for his kinsman's sin. I forgive him freely, but the other—"

"He, too, is dead," said George Bland, simply.

"And, therefore, beyond earthly judgment," added Charles. "You do well to remind me that death cancels all; and, from what you say, he repented at last, and wished to undo his work."

There was a pause of a few seconds, during which the artist had time to recover his self-possession. Then Mr. Bland again took up the talk.

"The next step will be for you to pay your respects to Mr. Markham in the new character of his nephew. There I must warn you to act with caution; we may have to contend with a little jealousy. Though I thought him the proper person to apply to for assistance, and placed important papers in his hands, he knows nothing about the miniature, nor my knowledge of the name of Marston. I kept it back for obvious reasons."

The speaker did not vouchsafe any definition of his obvious reasons; he was reticent about telling Charles that, having only a speculative

interest in the case, he was suspicious of undue participation in the secret which he had always intended to trade upon.

The other roused himself from a reverie, and said, "In the mean time what about the present possessor? We are overlooking that part of the subject."

"You mean your father's daughter by the second marriage. As I said before, it would be a pity for such a fine fortune to be wasted on a girl. I suppose you know that she is ward to Daniel Cawton, the rich merchant?"

A scarcely perceptible sneer curled his lips as he uttered the name.

Charles started. "That is Hugh's uncle, and it must have been her I saw with him at the Royal Academy." Then followed thoughts which he did not speak aloud. "I am glad my new sister is not sour-looking or ugly, I and hope we shall like each other."

George Bland soon after took his leave, having arranged for a meeting next day at the office of Lawyer Markham, when all the necessary proceedings were to be decided upon. Before they parted, he managed to open the way for future negotiation by dropping a delicate hint about his own worldly losses, and the large pecuniary sacrifices which the affair had cost him from the first.

When Charles Marston—or Rivers, as we must now call him—found himself again alone, he paced the room for some minutes, then walked into his studio, and subsided into quiet before his nearly completed picture.

"My Margaret," he murmured softly, then fell to dreaming of the future.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### UNDER FOOT.

"You are the young man who was here on Monday named Cawton?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Jackson is engaged, but he left this for you;" and the little hard-faced man, who was general manager and factotum to Messrs. Jackson and Co., pushed a slip of paper into the hand that was eagerly extended to receive it.

Sorry to say we are suited—JACKSON & Co.

It contained only these few words, but they were enough to crush out the last sustaining hope from a young heart, and scatter into air the dreams which had been woven upon that one solitary chance of success—dreams of brave, helpful struggle, to be rewarded at last by fair and honorable recognition. That was all he asked, the opportunity to work and raise himself.

Poor Hugh! just when his heart was growing sick from repeated failures, Messrs. Jackson and Co. had been the only firm where his application had been met with the request to call again. His sanguine fancy had interpreted it as a hope-

ful sign, and on that slight foundation he had begun to build his fabric of promise, which the merchant's curt missive had so rudely dashed down. His fingers clung tremblingly about the slip of paper, and he made a desperate effort to steady himself, and hold up his head in the presence of the little hard-faced man, who was scrutinizing him through his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Suited, always suited," he muttered under his breath; "ever the same answer to crush me down. Even Cousin Mark thought it likely I might succeed here; but it seems no use trying any longer to swim against the stream which has set against me."

While he stood there, a tall young man, with a pen behind his ear, came from the outer office, brushing rather unceremoniously against Hugh Cawton as he placed a bundle of papers on the manager's desk, at the same moment favoring him with a leisurely survey, and with a kind of supercilious pity, that made Hugh's face burn. His humiliation was complete when Messrs. Jackson's representative, after exchanging some business talk with the clerk, was seen to shrug his shoulders with a significant glance towards Hugh, as he leaned forward, saying, pointedly, "You have read your answer, which you are to take as final."

"I have," faltered Hugh.

"Then you need not wait any longer, as there is no other message for you."

And with a manner that was intended to confirm this summary hint of dismissal, the manager resumed his talk with the clerk, turning his back upon Hugh, as though his existence was to be ignored from that moment.

The young man turned proudly away, the scarlet flush of shame burning hotly in his cheeks; shame not only for his own humiliation, but the insulting heartlessness of the man who had given that double sting to his disappointment. He had once thought of trying to obtain a personal interview with the principal, Mr. Jackson, with some vague hope that he might be induced to reconsider his decision, and, perhaps, find him some kind of employment in the firm; but now this idea was utterly rejected, and he choked back the unspoken words, almost angry, and ready to charge himself with meanness for ever favoring such an intention.

Without deigning another glance towards the desk where the two still continued talking, the manager, in his pompous self-importance, purposely, as it seemed to Hugh's chafed spirit, making a parade of his insulting disregard of his presence, the young man walked steadily out of the office, his manner losing none of its gentlemanly dignity from the crush he had just received. The firm step and the erect head betrayed nothing of the heartache which he carried with him, nor showed any sign of the despair that gloomed over his expressive face when he was fairly out of sight of the premises of Messrs. Jackson and Co., and had turned aside from the noise of traffic, striking into the heart of some of the



quiet old courts and alleys which abounded in that quarter of the city—dreamy, out-of-the-way nooks, where the days passed in a perpetual twilight, and the nights had a strange weird stillness.

There Hugh was comparatively free from observation, and paced swiftly to and fro, as though

overflowed into that quiet by-way, and sent back a tributary stream to the rushing sea of city life that surged round it all day long. Then Hugh stepped hurriedly aside, as if he felt himself an idle obstruction. On his right was a huge block of warehouses, one of which was unoccupied, to judge from its dinginess and darkness, the thick



And subsided into quiet before his nearly completed picture.

he had made up his mind to walk down his feverish agitation, and not venture from the friendly seclusion until he could face the noise and glare of busy life in a calmer mood.

He kept up that restless march until, as the morning advanced, the great wave of traffic

curtains of dust which hung over its windows, and a general aspect of forlorn disuse that strongly impressed Hugh, for it seemed in melancholy unison with his own feelings. He shrank back and leaned against the door, looking wistfully at the strip of blue sky which

smiled above that dreary brick-and-mortar prison. Outside he knew that the bright spring sunshine was enriching the dusty pavement with golden gleams, and the sweet spring warmth was in the air. He had felt it that morning in his walk from Islington. But it was not these thoughts which brought that sudden flush into his cheek. He had other associations with that soft spring month, for it recalled the memory of a certain bright day in the year that was past—one of his rare holidays. Could it really be twelve months since he went with Charles Marston and Margaret to the Royal Academy, and saw that face, all light, and glow, and sparkle, which his mind had preserved as a photograph, intensely vivid and real?

So it had remained, a mental picture which he hoarded away and feasted his eyes upon, with something of the same homage which his artist friend gave to his creations of nymphs and naiads. Since then he had often heard her name on the lips of his Cousin Mark, who talked of her with an easy familiarity, and a certain tone of proprietorship, which only left one inference to be drawn. The subject always irritated Hugh, without reason, as he tried to convince himself; for it was not likely that he would ever be any thing but a stranger to his uncle's rich ward. Still the picture kept its secret shrine in his memory, and his irritation remained, a problem which he had not yet set himself to solve.

He came out of his reverie with a conscious, detected look, sternly taking himself to task for indulging such thoughts, and returned sadly to present realities, preparing to grapple with the grim question of what was to be done next.

"It is the last resource," he said, gloomily; "I have failed everywhere else, so nothing is left to me now but to go lower down. Pride shall not bar my way. I said I would do it, and I will. I am ready for any kind of work, however rough and coarse; I care not so that it be honest, and will keep me from being a burden on those at home."

Just then it occurred to him that he had not tasted food since his early breakfast, and some idea of dinner crossed his mind. He had money in his possession—a solitary silver coin, which his mother had forcibly pressed upon him, with an entreaty that he would get dinner in the city. But he had his own grave doubts about the state of the family exchequer, and uncomfortable suspicions concerning the contents of the bead purse, which his mother always contrived to hurry from his sight. The result was that he could not consent to allow his appetite any more liberal provision than a small roll and a draught of water.

He had just finished his light repast, and emerged into the public street, when he was run against by two burly laborers smoking short black pipes. The sight of them sufficed to give definite form and color to an idea which had been revolving in his mind. His refined sense shrank from the coarse language and the fumes of bad tobacco, but he conquered the feeling at once, and put his

question—an inquiry as to the locality of certain extensive building works, where he knew that a large staff of laborers were kept. There he intended to apply for work on his own account. The men answered civilly, and gave him the information he sought.

While talking with the two men, Hugh had not noticed the approach of a low open carriage, with two sleek gray ponies, driven by a middle-aged coachman in plain livery. The occupants were an elderly lady and a young one. Hugh did not see them until the carriage was within a few paces from him; then he chanced to look in that direction, and saw, flashing brightly out from its delicate surrounding of lace and flowers, the face which had lived so long in his dreams—gay, blooming May Rivers. The blood leaped hotly to his face, and every pulse quivered with the wild thrill of recognition. May saw that she was recognized, and acknowledged it with a gracious bend of the head, and such a smile as Mark Danson had never succeeded in winning for himself. Hugh responded by raising his hat with the native grace of movement which no adverse circumstances could take from him.

"My dear May, I do wish you would not be so impulsive," came in a remonstrative whisper from the folds of Aunt Lydia's antique-looking lace veil. "To whom were you bowing, my dear?"

"Why, auntie, is it possible that you did not recognize him—my guardian's nephew, Hugh Crawton?"

"What! the person I saw talking to those low-looking men?" and the dignified spinster looked her dismay.

"Why not, aunt? Perhaps they had been asking him a question; and, after all, there are honest hearts under fustian jackets. For my own part, I think that if we were to seek for it, we should find as much true courtesy in a working man as in a gentleman in Rotten Row: 'The gowd is but the guinea stamp, a man's a man for a' that.' Don't be shocked, dear aunt. I suppose this comes from association with my eccentric guardian, and I have caught something of his cynical tone."

Here May laughed, and threw back her head with the pretty, saucy gesture so characteristic of her. She knew that Aunt Lydia had aristocratic sympathies. The old lady said nothing, but her thin aquiline nose confined a sniff of disapprobation to the depths of a snowy pocket-handkerchief, and she drew her velvet cloak more closely round her, wishing that her darling would not encourage such peculiar ideas.

In the mean time Hugh Crawton stood in a trance of pain and pleasure, watching the carriage as it disappeared. She must have seen him standing with the laborers, yet she had bowed and smiled; but she could not know his secret—the stigma that rested on his name. This thought brought with it a sharp pang.

"Shall I do it—seek laborer's work, and divide myself still farther from her and her sphere? Yes; we can never be any thing to



each other, and I must not break faith with myself."

An hour's rapid walking brought him to the place he sought—a large stone-yard, guarded by a huge mastiff in a green-painted kennel. He was directed to a little wooden office, where a short, thick-set man sat at a desk. After some minutes, Hugh came out, with hot cheeks, an angry light in his eyes, and the word "failure" stamped on his dry, parched lips. In reply to his petition for work, he had been roughly told that there was none to suit him; that he would never be able to earn his wages, for his hands were too white and delicate to hold a hammer.

The great dog gave him a friendly wag of his tail as he passed, striding rapidly on, unheeding the curious, inquisitive glances that were sent after him.

"Am I indeed fit for nothing?" he asked himself bitterly; "rejected even on the lower level. What have I done, that every door should thus be closed against me?"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### MAY'S VERDICT.

MAY RIVERS and her aunt were going to dine at Broombank. The partners had left business early in the day, and the brougham had called and taken up the ladies.

A visible change had come over the old merchant since the discharge of his nephew, Hugh. He shunned society more than ever, and the cynical tone had grown upon him. Even Mark Danson often felt the bite of his caustic humor, and winced under the lash of some rasping observation that made him anxious and uncomfortable, doubtful whether it was the result of accident, or his uncle had gained some inkling of his own well-guarded secrets, the mere possibility of which made him turn pale.

In this way he became a sort of spy on his uncle's movements, attaching himself with an apparently affectionate partiality for his society, though the old man proved often a morose companion. Then he grew nervously watchful of his correspondence, as though on the lookout for something, always distrustful if any letters marked "private" chanced to be among them. He had also fallen into a habit of watching his uncle's face, which seemed to him altered within the last few weeks—a grim, granite face, looking years older, with a harder set about the mouth, and more of that iron-gray look, which seemed meant to repel all friendly sympathy. Then the jealous bitterness rose in his heart, and if he had dared, he would have given utterance to the sneer, "This mask hides nothing from me. The old man can't get over his disappointment, and the overthrow of his pet theories about the model young man. I know that is at the root of all. He had such faith in our young cashier, and was getting so proud of him."

Hugh Crawton had come to be a forbidden name between the uncle and nephew. Whenever Mark tried to talk of him or his family, he was abruptly silenced; and once or twice, while the story of his disgrace was new, and hushed murmurs respecting it were circulating among the clerks (for the whole thing had erept out, by a sort of natural law of revelation), when Mark had ventured to speak on the subject to his uncle in terms of pity, pleading for lenity to Hugh on the score of his youth, he had drawn down upon himself a fierce outbreak of anger that was seldom indulged in by the self-controlled Daniel Crawton.

The visits of May Rivers and her aunt were a great relief to the monotony of life at Broombank. The master of the mansion submitted to them as so many sacrifices exacted by his position as guardian; for while he remained charged with the supervision of May's welfare, he held it his duty to see as much of the girl as possible, and learn all he could of her character; for, under the delusion that it would be securing the happiness of both, he still cherished a desire for a union between Mark Danson and the daughter of his old friend.

The important and (to May) very tiresome business of dinner was got through with all due propriety. The solemn-faced butler had placed the decanters between Mark and his uncle, and the ladies were at liberty to follow Mrs. Crane to the drawing-room, and dispose of themselves as they pleased. May had dashed into a spirited dance tune on the piano, whose keys were stiff from want of use, and which she declared was too sombre in its tone to play any thing lighter or livelier than the "Battle of Prague" and the "Dead March in Saul;" so she had broken off in the middle of a bar, and, leaving the two elderly ladies to finish their interesting discussion concerning the most approved remedy for indigestion, she fluttered out of the room, subsiding at last into the depths of a great easy-chair in her favorite room, the library. She liked its atmosphere of student-like seclusion, and the sight of its well-filled book-shelves. It pleased her to ramble about, reading some of the hard names on the backs of the grand old folios, for which she had great reverence, but had not yet aspired to the dignity of studying. She had picked up a volume of travels, with a view of beguiling the long hours; but she was rather disposed to sit still and dream, with her little restless hands crossed on the back of the unopened book, and her graceful head nestling against the crimson back of the chair. These fits of musing generally came over her during a visit at Broombank; something about the place seemed to make her grave and quiet, like the rest of the people she saw there. Perhaps because it was so much associated with old people, she saucily told Aunt Lydia. To be sure, there was Mr. Mark Danson: he lived at Broombank; and he was certainly not old, neither was he exactly young. She did not mean in years, but tone and manner. There

was something wanting, she could not tell what, to make him reach her standard of what a young man should be. This was always her conclusion, and the problem remained unsolved.

She was so absorbed in her own thoughts, that she did not know the door had opened and a cautious step was creeping towards her, until roused by the sound of Mark Danson's voice. He always made a point of following the ladies early after dinner. Not finding May in the drawing-room, he guessed where she had taken refuge, and went at once to the library.

The willful young heiress received him without any show of pleasure. She was not gratified by the invasion of her solitude, and it was not in her to simulate a feeling that she had not.

"I am half afraid you will think this an intrusion, Miss Rivers; but it was not to be expected that I could make myself comfortable in the drawing-room, and I divined that I should find you here."

"Did you, indeed, Mr. Danson?"

"I hope you are not angry."

"Angry! how absurd to think that I could be moved by such a trifle, as if you did not know that, so far as I am concerned, you are at liberty to go anywhere you please;" and May, turning over the leaves of her book, gave him a glance from under her long lashes that was any thing but complimentary to himself.

Mark bit his lip, as he replied, "That means, you are quite indifferent on the subject. It would be singular if I did not know it, since you always take such pains to impress me with that fact."

She gave him a saucy inclination of her head by way of assent, and looked down again at her book. From a feeling of indifference, not unmixed with contempt, she had come at last to the discovery that she disliked her guardian's nephew, and had even told Aunt Lydia, in confidence; adding her indignant wonder that Daniel Cawton should make such unfair distinctions as he did between Mark Danson and that other cousin whose father was poor.

The gentleman smothered his resentment, and severely tasked his conversational resources in his efforts to amuse the fair guest. May paid him a sort of languid attention, smiling now and then, but contenting herself with monosyllabic answers, and showing little interest in any thing he said, until the talk chanced to turn on her last visit to the Academy, and her introduction to his cousins, Hugh Cawton and his sister. The allusion was any thing but agreeable to Mark. He recollected that May had mentioned it before, and questioned him about the Cawton family more closely than he thought necessary. He could not forbear a sneer.

"I have no doubt but my cousins would be very grateful if they knew how kindly you keep them in remembrance, Miss Rivers, particularly now when they are so sadly in need of sympathy."

"What, is their father so ill?"

"Not worse than usual; I was alluding to poor Hugh. Of course, it will be a great trouble to the family; they are, as I said, sadly in need of sympathy, and, under the circumstances, even their best friends might find an excuse for withholding it."

He took pleasure in watching May's bewildered look as she listened.

"You talk strangely, Mr. Danson. What do you mean by calling your cousin poor Hugh?"

"Ah, I see you are ignorant of what has occurred. Perhaps I ought not to tell you."

"Not tell!" repeated May, impetuously; "you must, Mr. Danson. If you do not, I will find out for myself."

"In that case I will, as you shift from me all responsibility and blame."

Here he fancied he saw a slight curl on the young lady's lip, but he was not sure. He continued, "You will understand me better when I say that this unhappy affair nearly concerns our family credit, but I feel sure the secret will be safe in your keeping."

"Secret—family credit," faltered May, her face flushing. "I was wrong to let my curiosity go so far, but I had no idea it was any thing serious. Family confidences should be always held sacred; I have no right to intrude, neither have I the wish. I would rather not hear what you have to tell. Please let us talk of something else."

"But your knowing it will do no harm, Miss Rivers, and I think you have a right to be told. With all our caution, the thing will be sure to get whispered abroad, and we can not expect strangers to spare the suspected person as we are doing."

"Suspected person?" slowly repeated May, her large eyes dilating.

Mark then told the history of his cousin's disgrace—told it with pitiless accuracy that softened nothing, and did not spare the unfortunate young man, though he confined himself strictly to facts, and expressed no opinion of his own. If he had been counsel for the prosecution, and Hugh Cawton the prisoner at the bar, it was just the sort of statement that would have told against him. He watched with curious interest the effect of his communication, for May's face was a study in its varying expression as she listened.

"Do you believe him guilty, Mr. Danson?" she asked, slowly.

He answered with hesitation that was in itself significant against Hugh: "I—I should not like to say; the condemning evidence is very strong."

May took up the defense in her usual warm, impetuous way, and replied, with more force than logic, "I don't care a bit about the evidence, Mr. Danson, though it is, as you say, against him. I will not believe but it is all a mistake. I am a stranger to your cousin—I have only spoken to him once—but if there is any thing to be read in faces, he looks like one who might be trusted with any thing."

Mark shook his head. "Woman's reason-

ing, Miss Rivers; sounds well, but would be quite worthless with a dozen practical jurymen. I am afraid it would fare badly with Hugh Cawton, if he went into a court of justice with no better evidence in his favor."

"I call it natural evidence," retorted May, piqued at his tone; "and for my own part, Mr. Danson, I should sooner expect to hear of you being accused than your cousin."

"Would you, indeed," said Mark, dryly. "You have, at least, the merit of frankness, Miss Rivers. Now, in your case, I should call 'natural evidence' a predisposition to favorable judgment of certain persons."

Her color rose as she said, "I am not inclined to discuss points of definition."

"I shall be sorry if I have said any thing to offend you, Miss Rivers, particularly when I wish to convey my grateful sense of the warm sympathy which you, a stranger, have evinced for my cousin."

May looked at him steadily, not sure that some covert sarcasm did not lurk beneath his words. At that moment her fiat went out against him, and she decided that she disliked Mr. Mark Danson more than ever. Something in his manner provoked her, and she wanted to retort, but the words would not come.

He resumed: "My sympathy goes with the father, though I am afraid Hugh Cawton's mother has spoiled him by her training. There is generally some fault of that kind, when only sons do not turn out well."

"I deny that libel," struck in a well-known voice that made both start; and, turning round, to Mark's unutterable dismay, he saw his uncle standing in the middle of the room.

How long he had been there, and how much he had overheard of their talk, could not be told. Their attention had been so preoccupied, that the opening of the door had not disturbed them, and they had not a suspicion of his proximity until he spoke. May thought her guardian seemed unusually excited; only Mark knew, from certain signs, how angry he was.

"Yes, I say, a libel, and an ungallant speech, unworthy of a gentleman. It has been Hugh Cawton's good fortune to have a mother exemplary in every sense; but even if it were otherwise, I despise men who are always ready to cast reflections upon women. It is an insult to their own mothers."

His words swept over them like a biting gust of wind. May looked at him with mingled wonder and awe in her brown eyes. Mark did not venture a reply, but sat so cowed and crest-fallen, that the young lady felt increasing contempt for him.

Daniel Cawton spoke again: "Take this lesson to heart, Mark Danson, and while under my roof, do not dare again to drag Mrs. Cawton into your discussions of family affairs." He then turned to his ward, saying, "Miss Rivers, I have a communication to make, and must have a few minutes' private talk with you."

As he spoke he glanced at an open letter

which he held in his hand. His nephew understood the hint, and rose at once, muttering something about "not wishing to intrude," and, inwardly deploring his own ill-luck, hurried from the room with more speed than dignity, leaving his uncle to make the communication which he rightly guessed had reference to the letter which he had seen.

It had only arrived that afternoon, a young man, looking like a lawyer's clerk, having been expressly sent from town to place it in the hands of May's guardian. It was from Mr. Markham, and contained the first intimation of the new claimant for the wealth of Colonel Rivers, in the person of his long-lost son.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"OH, Nelly, I feel now that I could bear any thing, if I could only be sure that you would soon be well, or if I could just give up and lie down in your place;" and Giles Royton brought his haggard face closer to his daughter's pillow.

She had been ill for several weeks; it was a case of complete prostration and debility. The doctor talked of tonics and fresh air, but his patient grew weaker day after day, and he looked graver each time that he counted the feeble fluttering of the pulse as her slender white wrist lay so passively under his fingers. Perhaps he had a suspicion which Eleanor herself could have confirmed, that she was drooping under a sickness of mind rather than of body. But on this subject the lips of both were sealed, and the poor heart ached on, as many other hearts are aching round us every day; for who can guess what depths of suffering lie hidden in some of those still, gray lives of women who live on with their world apparently filled only with common tasks and sordid cares? So it had been with Eleanor. The days came and went without lifting up the weary head, or bringing back the color to the pale worn face; days on which the shadow of trouble brooded darkly over the silent house, and in which, in spite of the doctor's skill, with all the tender ministrations of her father, and the devoted care of her humble nurse, Ann, there was no promise of the invalid getting well.

Giles Royton had just come home from work; there was no gambling away the nights now.

"Yes, Nelly," he resumed, fondling the thin hand that lay outside the coverlet, "I would take your place if I could, for I'm only a useless clog, and it's natural for the old to go before the young. How have you been to-day, dear?"

"About the same, father. I have had a visitor."

"A visitor, Nelly! Who?" drawing a long breath, and looking anxiously at her.

A faint flush crept to her cheek. "Not he of whom you thought, father; I do not expect to

see him now." She raised herself on her elbow and added, "Margaret Crawton has been here."

"Oh, Mr. Hugh's sister. I remember you two were once great friends."

"And are still, father; it is the only friendship I ever formed for a girl. I took Margaret to my heart from the first. She is in sore trouble now about her brother."

"And well she may be, poor thing! Such a sad disgrace. To my knowledge, nothing of the kind ever happened before in our firm."

Eleanor's great, wistful eyes were fastened on him. They seemed to have grown larger since her illness.

"What is it you want to say, Nelly?"

She cast a cautious glance towards the door, as if to assure herself there was no danger of their talk being overheard, and then whispered, "It is as Margaret thinks: her brother has an unknown enemy, who has plotted his ruin—some enemy whose position keeps him safe from suspicion. Father, Hugh Crawton is innocent, and you know it."

He started and recoiled. "Nelly, what are you saying?"

"The truth. I remember the night you came home and told me Hugh Crawton had got his dismissal; and afterwards, when you took my message to Mark about the paper, and you had that angry scene together in the office, you dropped hints which I have never forgotten."

"What—what did I say, Nelly?" faltered her father, nervously clutching the bed-clothes.

"Something about holding a check against him, and daring him to do his worst about getting you sent away. I guessed then there was something wrong—now I am sure; and, father, I want you to tell me all."

He gave her a helpless look of protest against the request, and dropped into a chair by the bedside, murmuring, "All, Nelly? Are you sure that you can bear to hear it?"

"Yes; I will force myself, as I have done in other things. Besides, I hold this to be my duty. Father, I am grieved that you should have kept it from me."

"Don't say that, my girl; don't say that. I did it for the best, because I—I wished to spare you from knowing all his villainy."

Eleanor shivered and hid her face a moment in the pillow, saying, with quivering lips, "My suspicion is true, then; it was Mark Danson who plotted his cousin's ruin!"

The father was scarcely less agitated than his daughter. "This is what I feared, Nelly; it is too much for you to bear. Better not hear it to-night."

"No—no!" she cried, with feverish energy.

"I can not rest until I know how you came to be the keeper of his secret. Tell me all, holding nothing back. But first answer me one question: Had you any share in that wronging of an innocent man?"

"I had not, Eleanor."

"Thank God!" she said, brokenly; "it is

bad enough as it is, father, but I think that would have killed me."

She was trembling, and crying to herself—quiet, slow-dropping tears that might have been counted as they fell. He leaned down and kissed her forehead with a reverent feeling that the weak woman was far above him in her goodness and stronger sense of right—far above him, for he was thinking of his own misused life; and for the first time was self-convicted of playing fast and loose with his conscience in the matter of Mark Danson, and the discovery of his secret.

For some seconds nothing was said; then Eleanor whispered, "I am better now, father, and ready to listen."

"It was only by chance that I found it out, Nelly; but from the first that Mr. Hugh came I had my suspicion that Mr. Mark had an evil eye on his cousin, though he made much of him, and they seemed to be close friends. So I made up my mind to watch, for I may as well own it now, Nelly; I wanted to get at his secrets, and find something that would give me a hold against him."

He watched his daughter's face as he spoke. She only made a sign for him to go on.

"When first Mr. Crawton picked up the betting voucher that fell out of Mr. Hugh's drawer, and they blamed him for it, I knew who the real owner was, as I had in my possession a piece which had been torn off the voucher, with Mark Danson's name on it, and I had found out that he did a little business for himself in that line on the quiet. After that storm had blown over I kept my watch closer than ever, for I knew he would not stop in the work he had begun. I was right. It wasn't for nothing that he had taken a fancy for coming back to the office when the clerks were gone, and sitting there poring over Mr. Hugh's books. You remember, Nelly, I told you one night that I had disturbed Mr. Mark. It was then I saw him thrust some papers between the wall and his desk, the moment he heard me; and on searching there afterwards, I found something which he must have overlooked when he took away the rest. It was a copy of that receipt which has worked all the mischief to poor Mr. Hugh, and I knew that he had been trying his hand at forgery. I let him go on thinking himself safe, but when the time came that I had waited for, I whispered it to him, and he was nearly mad with terror—offered me large bribes of money—any thing, if I would give up the evidence I held, or burn it before his eyes. But what I want, Nelly, is to see you righted; he shall do you justice before the world."

He had spoken rapidly throughout. Eleanor made no attempt to interrupt, but when he finished, she turned upon him her great eyes full of sad reproach.

"And it was for me that you did this, father; let an innocent man suffer disgrace, perhaps ruin for life, and kept to yourself the knowledge that would have saved him."

"But only for a time, Nelly—only for a time. I took care of the papers, because I knew they would serve as evidence; I always meant to clear Mr. Hugh, but I wanted first to frighten Mark, and force him to do right by you."

"Father, that was not the way; we may not do evil that good may come. Such a secret is sure to bring misery on those who consent to share it, and it seems to me that some of the guilt falls on them also."

Giles Royton hung down his head. He had a high respect for Eleanor's principles and opinions. He had educated her above his own sphere, and was accustomed to say that she could talk like a book when she pleased. There was something of awe in his yearning look as he asked, "What would you have me do, my dear?"

"Your duty, which lies plain before you; for so long as you keep it untold you are doing a wrong to your master. At any cost, Hugh Cawton must be cleared."

"Yes, Nelly, I always intended that."

He spoke in the tone that might have been used to soothe the fretful impotency of a sick child. Eleanor was not satisfied.

"Whatever is done must be done without delay; there must be no half-measures—no temporizing with a thing that involves so much. We can not tell what mischief it has done, and for you to stand by and let it all go on before your eyes, it is like seeing a man sink down without stretching out your hand to save him."

"Nelly, you are exciting yourself too much."

Her flushed cheeks and hurried breathing justified his fears. She talked rapidly, and for the time all languor was gone. She went on: "I can not forget the face that was at my bedside this afternoon, not that Margaret said much, she never was a talker, but I knew her trouble all the same. Father, you remember that time, years ago, when you were out of a situation, and I first went to work at the warehouse where I met Margaret—you recollect, we had known each other at school—well, she was kind to me when no one else was. She was poor, too, but I was poorer then, and she fancied that my scanty dinners were not enough for a growing girl, so she divided her own with me many times, though there was never more than enough for herself. Remembering that now, if it were only for Margaret Cawton's sake, I should want you to do right by her brother. Father, promise me that you will."

"I promise, Nelly."

Thus it is that the little seeds of kindness which we sow around us may bear fruit a hundred-fold, and result in a ripened harvest of good deeds. How little did Margaret Cawton dream that in the poor invalid whom she visited that day she had raised up a friend all-powerful to influence her brother's fate, and that the little acts of charity which she had done and forgotten were thus to be returned to her "after many days."

Giles Royton was more moved than he wish-

ed to show. "And what of Mark Danson?" he whispered.

"He must be left to reap as he has sown," replied Eleanor, feebly. "My love for him is dead! It would have lived through trials, poverty, sickness—even death; but his own unworthiness has killed it."

The flush had gone from her face, and she dropped wearily back on her pillows. At that moment the door opened, and Ann made her appearance with a basin containing some preparation for the invalid's supper. She stood by the bed, a grotesque little figure, with sleeves turned back from her red arms, and skirts tucked round her, as though fresh from the scrubbing of a floor—looking as little like a nurse as possible, but making up in devotion all that she wanted in other respects. Her round eyes grew rounder with earnestness, as she stood urging her mistress to let herself be propped up. "And please drink it while it's 'ot, ma'am."

Eleanor smiled, and forced herself to swallow a few spoonfuls, to reward the zeal of her attendant.

She was grateful even for a kind thought from those about her, and, even in common things, true to the fine nature that was in her.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### BREAKING THE NEWS.

THE guardian and ward looked at each other; it was on both sides a curious, speculative look, as though each were anxious to tell the other's thoughts at that moment. May was secretly rejoicing in the memory of the recent ebullition against Mark Danson. It made her feel a growing regard for his uncle, the discovery that he was not (as she had supposed) utterly blind to the young gentleman's defects.

"Now, if I might venture to say a word in Hugh Cawton's favor— But, no; how silly I am! Of course it would do no good, and it is not my business."

Her cheeks crimsoned at the idea of her interference, and the imputation that it would be likely to bring upon her from her guardian. Then, meeting his steadfast gaze, she demurely dropped her eyes, and, for want of better occupation for her restless fingers, began fraying the edges of her waist-ribbon. His eyes seemed keen enough to penetrate any thing. What if they had really read what was passing in her mind?

It was a far different subject that engrossed the thoughts of Daniel Cawton; he was thinking of the letter and its contents, by which he had himself been much startled. He remembered the circumstance of the mysterious loss of Colonel Rivers's son, and the hopeless search which had been carried on for months. But the child had been so long given up for dead, that he had never imagined the probability of his restoration. At first he was inclined to treat



the unexpected claim as an imposition—the trick of some needy adventurer; but a little reflection told him that the co-operation of the late colonel's brother-in-law, Mr. Markham, was a sufficient guaranty for the respectability of the claimant. He felt convinced that he was too practical and matter-of-fact to allow him-

referred to the money element. Of course the change in worldly prospects would make no difference to his plan of the marriage with his nephew; it was May herself, and not the fortune, that Mark would marry. In any case, she would inherit a daughter's portion, and for the rest, the young people would be wealthy at



"And please drink it while it's 'ot, ma'am."

self to be easily imposed upon, and too prudent and far-seeing to give either his professional services or personal interest to any unsupported suit. But if it were proved, how would it influence the future of his ward, and how would she receive the news? This question

his death. But it would be a very trying position for a young girl, educated in the belief that she was a rich heiress, to be suddenly lowered to disenchanted ground, and dispossessed of the magic wand of power that would have been all potent in her young hands—truly a trying posi-

tion. How would May Rivers go through it? In spite of his cynical tendencies, he felt himself strangely moved towards that slight young creature with the smooth brow, which no shadow had yet touched. Watching her thus, with her down-dropped eyes and glowing cheeks, she looked like a rosebud, or any other bright, fresh thing that the world has not spoiled.

May waited for her guardian to speak, showing an amount of patience that would have astonished Aunt Lydia, but casting furtive glances at the letter in his hand, and beginning to feel some natural feminine curiosity as to what might be the formidable communication which he had to make.

To another listener, Daniel Crawton would have told what he had to tell with his usual curt abruptness, softening nothing. He wondered himself at the new mood which had come over him; for that day his temper had been chafed in many ways, and he had been angrily excited in the scene with his nephew.

"No use trying to make guesses at the contents of this letter, Miss May; you are not clever enough to divine any thing, until I tell you."

She laughed, and raised her eyes. "I can not deny that, so I must submit to wait in patience."

He looked grave now. The thought had returned to him, that her bright face would be clouded by the news which he had to break. He began again: "I believe you were very young when you left India, May?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"Almost too young to know any thing about family affairs; but it would be handed down to you as a tradition, and Aunt Lydia would be sure to tell you all the details. I allude to the loss of your half-brother. At that time you would be only a baby."

"My half-brother!" exclaimed May, excitedly: "yes, I do know that strange story; it has haunted me from childhood. I had a colored nurse, who told me all. Aunt Lydia never likes to talk about it."

"Did it ever occur to you that this brother, lost for so many years, and whom we have all given up as dead, might one day be restored to his name and inheritance?"

As he spoke, he closely scrutinized the expressive face, which showed the varying turns of feeling and thought, like reflections thrown upon a mirror. He was not prepared for the eagerness with which she gave her answer.

"Yes, that possibility has occurred to me, and I have often wished that it might be so."

Daniel Crawton smiled a grim, skeptical smile as he said, "What! do you tell me that you have wished to resign that which promises you a brilliant position in society, and will secure you the envy and admiration of your friends—resign, too, in favor of some stranger, who might repel you at first sight? It would have been far different if you had been old enough to form an affection for that unknown brother—if you had been playmates together, and there

had been the tie of childhood's associations between you."

May felt hurt at his tone. "I hope my guardian knows me better than to think I would say what I did not mean. I repeat, I have wished often that he might be found."

"But very likely you did not take into account the worldly sacrifices which you would be called upon to make," remarked the cynical guardian.

"If you mean the surrender of my heiress-ship, I should not regard that as a misfortune which could not be got over, particularly when it would give me the delight of having a brother to take care of me. I could fancy him very good and clever, and myself getting quite proud of him; for we should soon get used to each other, and I should make him love me in spite of himself."

The merchant twisted the corner of his letter, and looked intently at a bust of Milton. In his heart, he breathed, "She is quite a child still—even more simple and artless than I thought. God bless her! and keep her always that fresh girl's heart."

May spoke again, a little timidly: "I have not named my other reason for wishing my father's heir could be found. I told you Aunt Lydia disliked talking of the occurrence. It is on account of my dear mother. Good as she was, there were those about her who dared to whisper their suspicions that she was concerned in the disappearance of the boy—dared to hint that she had done it for the interest of her own child. When I heard about it first," continued May, her voice trembling, and tears flashing through the fire in her eyes, "it almost made me hate the wealth which had been the occasion of it, though it was my father's."

"I remember it, May; but the base slander was crushed as it deserved. Your father was not the man to rest until he had silenced those evil tongues."

"But the mischief had been done," said May, sadly. "They tell me that it threw a shadow over the last years of my mother's life; and we do not know that her memory has not been breathed upon by the same evil tongues. If the boy could only have been restored at the right time, I should not have cared if I had been left without a shilling."

"I understand your feeling, child; but what could you have done with poverty?"

"It need not have been poverty; I could have worked."

He gave her a compassionate look, and, pointing to the letter in his hand, said, "In the mean time we are forgetting this. As your patience has been sufficiently tried, I must tell you that I had a purpose in leading you upon the subject of your half-brother. I have received this letter from Lawyer Markham, the brother of the first Mrs. Rivers. Your aunt will know him, though you do not. He tells me he has reason to believe that his nephew is found in the person of a young artist called Marston."

"Found!" exclaimed May, joyfully catching at the letter which he handed to her; "how glad I shall be!"

"To lose your inheritance," put in the old man, dryly.

"Marston," said May, thoughtfully, taking from her pocket a set of tiny ivory tablets, and glancing over them. "It is as I thought; that was the name of the young man who walked with Miss Cawton the day we visited the Academy; but I can not think that it is the same."

There was a pause, during which, May, at her guardian's request, read Mr. Markham's letter.

When she had finished, he said, "Now that you are in possession of the details, it will only remain for me to watch the case for the protection of your interests. There must be strict legal investigation, for, to guard against the tricks of adventurers, we can not be too cautious in recognizing a claim of this kind. Even Lawyer Markham may be deceived. Now I think it is time for us to go into the drawing-room. I will leave you to break the news to Aunt Lydia, but not at present; it will only throw the old lady out of her groove, and spoil her peace for the evening."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### MARGARET'S DECISION.

"Yes, Margaret, it is settled, and 'Our Romance of Real Life' promises to have a very pleasant finish. My identity is proved to everybody's satisfaction; and by general consent I take my new name and inheritance."

"And our old friend, Charles Marston, so long familiar to us all, passes away, and gives place to the new Charles Rivers."

Margaret Cawton stitched faster than ever, as she added this, with a slight quiver of her firm mouth—so slight, that her lover did not see it.

"Nay, Queen Margaret, I will not admit such a transformation; for the old friend still remains the same to you, under any name or condition."

The lovers were alone in the little parlor where Mrs. Cawton had received her son on the day of his disgrace. Margaret looked more careworn than usual, but she was busily at work, even while she talked. Charles sat by her side, a hopeless hindrance to the work in progress, though his masculine perversity would not recognize the fact, for he kept making harassing raids on her work-box, and confiscating her cotton; sometimes entirely suspending her needle, by taking possession of the hand that held it; to all which inflictions stately Margaret submitted with wonderful forbearance. His handsome face was full of animation, only subdued now and then by the thought of Hugh's trouble, which gloomed over his mind like a shadow. It was easy to see that, underlying all his assumed lightness, there was a vein of earnest purpose. And Margaret knew it: her wom-

an's instinct told her what question was trembling on his lips. She had looked forward to this interview with some fluttering of the heart, for she guessed it would bring pain to both; but her decision was made.

"Please don't hinder me, Charles," she pleaded, extricating her fingers from his clasp.

"What a busy bee you are, Margaret! How I long to see those hands folded in rest."

She smiled faintly, and her needle went slower than its wont. She was thinking of what was coming.

He went on: "And I hope soon to have that longing satisfied, dear one! Shall I tell you why I rejoice in this fortune?—because it will put an end to our time of probation, and give me the crown of my life."

She was silent still, with face down bent, and eyes veiled under their drooping white lids,—silent, at the moment when he was expecting some response to the gladness that filled his own heart, and watching so eagerly to see some light of the new happiness reflected in her face. But her look remained shyly averted, and the pure, pale cheek caught no warmer hue from his words. He was disappointed, and hurt.

"Not one word, nor even a look, to answer me. What does this mean, Margaret?—surely, not doubt nor fear of the future? There was none of it until success came—not in the old time, when it was all work and waiting; for in the midst of it, I remember, we were always hopeful. And when I came, however gloomy the day might have been, my bird always tried to sing me a cheery note."

"Oh, Charles! don't you understand me better than this?"

The needle was silent now, and her hand was seeking his. She was still his own Margaret, unchanged in love and loyalty to him. He recognized that at once, but was farther than ever from knowing what had made her so strangely dumb to him in his happiness. He stroked the soft bands of hair, and murmured some of the pet words which he had a fond habit of using to her.

"My queen lily, that I shall be so proud to cherish! you know well that, from the time we first met, I never had a dream or hope of better fortune in which you did not share; and that this wealth is doubly welcome, because it will enable me to give a richer setting to my gem."

Then Margaret, letting her hand nestle in his clasp, told him gently all that was in her thoughts. "And Charles," she said, in conclusion, her voice trembling slightly, "I want you to believe now, and always, that I made this decision for your sake, and because I thought it best for both."

"Oh, Margaret! I could not have expected this blow to come from your hand. Now, when there is nothing to delay our marriage, you suddenly draw back from your promise, and throw an obstacle in our way of which I should never have dreamed. Why should this trouble of your brother's keep us apart?"



"Not his trouble alone, but ours," she corrected, gently; "it has fallen on us all."

"Yes, I know," he said hastily; "but why not let me help to bear it with you? Hugh himself gave me a brother's right, when he took me into confidence, and told me the history of the unhappy affair. Margaret, you are the hardest

garet's eyes; and, in spite of all its firmness, her mouth had a quiver of pain as she spoke.

"Is it possible that you can so far mistake me, Charles; that you have no better light by which to judge me and my motive for refusing to become your wife, while the shadow of suspicion rests upon my brother's name? It is be-



"I made this decision for your sake."

upon me, for you thrust me from you into the outside circle of strangers, who may not come near your inner life. Is it that you think my love is only made for summer and sunshine? that it will not bear the storm and cloud?"

There was a strange, grieved look in Mar-

cause I hold your honor dear as our own. We Crawtons are proudly sensitive on these points."

Then he wound his arm round her, and begged forgiveness for saying any thing to pain her; railing at his own want of discernment, and speaking hard things of himself, after the fashion of

lovers. But all his passionate pleading did not shake her resolution.

"Your brother is as innocent of those charges as I am, Margaret. Then why should we let it come between us and happiness?"

She shook her head sadly. "Our instincts tell us he is innocent, but that is not enough to clear him. However unfounded the suspicion, it has set its mark against Hugh, and while that remains, disgrace will cling to him. Hear me, Charles: your position in the world is changed now. You will find that your wealth entails new claims and obligations, which you will be obliged to recognize. Friends and advisers will tell you that you have a family's honor to sustain. It shall never be said that you disgraced it by your marriage, or that your wife was only too glad to accept the shield of your name."

"Oh, Margaret, Margaret! this is cruel to me," he repeated in a tone of keen distress.

"Not cruel, but kinder, perhaps, than you think. The present sacrifice may save future regrets. And for myself," she added, the tears gathering under her long lashes, "I should come to you with a divided heart, for I could not leave them in their time of trouble, and selfishly take my own brighter way while theirs is so deep in the shadow."

"But, united, we two may do much to help them through it, darling."

She shook her head. "No, Charles, I have made up my mind; but, whatever comes, I can never forget how nobly your love has stood the test of circumstances, and that the first use which you thought to make of your riches, was to share them with me and mine. Knowing this, it becomes my duty to take care of your interests. That is why I have decided not to marry until this cloud passes from our house, and none can have it in their power to censure you for linking your lot with the sister of one who defrauded his master and narrowly escaped a prison. That is what some of them say now of my brother," she continued, excitedly, "and he has heard them. The words seem to keep ringing through my own ears. Oh, Charles! I would do any thing, bear any pain, only to have him proved innocent. The world is so full of cruel, self-righteous judges, always ready to put a crushing foot upon the fallen. It is enough to drive Hugh desperate; and I sometimes think it would if it were not for our good mother and her prayers."

Charles had let her talk on without interruption, for his feelings were not what he could readily put into words. As she finished, she covered her face with her hands. He removed them gently, and held them in his own; for some minutes neither of them spoke. At last he whispered, "It shall be as you will, Margaret. I can not see that it is for the best; but as you require it, I consent to the sacrifice, hard as it is."

"But, Charles, it is not just for me to hold you bound; you might choose—"

"<sup>11</sup> stopped her hastily, with something like

anger in his tone, "Hush, Margaret, do not say that, I could not bear it to-night."

She looked at him through a mist of tears, her heart thrilling with strange, glad thankfulness for the strong, true love, on which she could build her faith as on a rock. "And for my sake," she murmured, softly, "you are willing to give up all the advantages which your altered position would secure you—give them up and consent to wait, not knowing where the end may be; for it might be months, even years."

"If it were seven times seven years I would still wait, Margaret. You are the only woman I ever loved, and I will have no other for my wife."

"And I no other husband."

A kiss and a fervent pressure of the hand sealed their compact. Then there was silence between them, till Margaret, lifting up her pale tear-stained face, whispered, "My brother must not know that he has any thing to do with the delay of our marriage, Charles; he feels every thing so deeply. Poor Hugh, we can only do as mother says,—leave his case in the hands of God."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A NICE NIGHT'S WORK.

DANIEL CRAWTON called himself a cynic—a man who had a quarrel with the world. After Hugh's disgrace, he affected embittered views of human nature, and a general disbelief in it. But this was not so, for in reality there was no limit to his trust and capacity for being imposed upon, in spite of his shrewdness. It never occurred to him to doubt the integrity of his nephew Mark, or distrust his veracity when he said that he would be compelled to remain in town for the night, having accepted an invitation to dine with an old friend who was passing through London *en route* for his home in the North.

This was implicitly believed by the old merchant, who took his frugal supper, and concluded the solitary evening in his library at Broombank, without a suspicion that any deception had been practised upon him, or any doubt as to the real nature of Mr. Mark's engagements in London. What a startling revelation for him, if he could have followed his nephew, who had changed his dress and so cunningly disguised himself as to defy recognition even from his friends. How he would have been startled to see him cross the threshold of one of those haunts which are responsible for so many wrecked lives and ruined homes; where men barter away their birthrights for less than "a mess of pottage;" one of the temples of that vice which he had all his life held in detestation—a gaming-house: for he traced to its influence all his sister's wedded misery, her husband's desertion, and her own untimely death. How he would have been shocked to see Mark received there like an habitual frequenter of the place; moving about the

room with an air of cool assurance, then dropping into a seat at one of the tables, his glance lingering over the groups of players with a compassionate contempt for the wild, eager faces, that showed a cruel strain of anxiety, as if they had staked their lives on the issue of the game. Mark held himself superior to the common excitement of the gambler; that phase of the passion was only for the novice. He drew a breath of relief when he had made his tour of inspection, for he had feared the possibility of encountering Giles Royton among the players.

The later hours of the night found him deep at play with an adversary whose appearance excited in him some languid curiosity,—an elderly man, with a thick gray mustache that might have been designed to hide the formation of his lips. He had a semi-genteel air that sat forlornly upon him, though his clothes were neither shabby nor worn. He played with a wild earnestness which had the passion of desperation in it, and the expression of his face was a study during the progress of the game. The stakes were high and the run of luck was against him. Each time that the gold changed hands, his lips tightened together, and there was a disappointed, covetous gleam in his eyes. He was a marked contrast to the younger player, with his calm, colorless face, and cool, courtly polish, sweeping aside his winnings with a careless unconcern, which had in it something insulting to the other, as though the one counted nothing of what was costing the other such keen anxiety.

Once during the evening Mark dropped from his pocket a card-case, on which his name was engraved; before he could recover it, the stranger's politeness forestalled him; but, somewhat to his annoyance, he observed that his opponent read the name. After that incident, the play seemed to become a fierce contest between them; it ended at last by the stranger rising excitedly, and pushing back his chair with a violence that nearly overturned it.

"I will play no more with you, for a good reason," he added, laughing harshly, "because I'm cleared out."

"That would be no reason for giving up," said Mark, taking out his gold repeater, and rising in his turn, "but it is getting very late, so I agree with you."

"A nice night's work," muttered the other, under his breath; "I've split on the old rock, and here's the upshot—a beggar again, for I haven't another secret to raise money upon. I don't like dunning Mr. Charles, and I can't expect old Markham to renew the supplies in this short time; so there's nothing for it but to turn to him."

He fell into a fit of moody abstraction, from which he was roused by Mark Danson, who was preparing for his departure.

"Pugh! it's nothing but the fortune of war; but I don't mind giving you the chance of taking your revenge on some other night."

"No," said the elder man, almost fiercely, "I never play with you again if I know it."

"As you please," replied Mark, with a slight shrug of his shoulders; "but as that resolution sounds rather eccentric, may I ask why?"

"Yes; and I will explain, if you will let me walk with you a little way. I can not talk here, for this room is stifling me."

Mark Danson was taken by surprise. He looked at the speaker, and hesitated before he gave his answer, some uncomfortable doubts about the stranger's intentions taking possession of his mind, and producing a sense of apprehension for his personal safety. He had a large share of cowardice in his nature.

The man before him seemed to be growing more excited every moment. Mark could not forget the significant fact, that the stranger had lost a considerable sum of money to him. From the time they sat down to play, the tide of luck had set against him; and he (Mark Danson) had pocketed the gains in his callous way, without a thought of the loser, or care for the misery and ruin which that night's work might bring. He began an excuse, murmuring something about the lateness of the hour, but he was abruptly cut short.

"Never mind, I will keep you company on the way to your hotel, or wherever you may be going to-night. I can say my say without taking you out of your road. Don't trouble yourself to coin excuses; I am not the man to be easily turned from a purpose, and I should judge you to be somewhat after the same fashion; and now as you force me to take this tone, I tell you that I must and will have my talk with you before we part."

Mark's forehead was damp with the dew of fear. He dared not oppose the will of his singular companion; something in the man's tone checked the remonstrance on his lips, and made him feel that he was no longer a free agent. Outside, in the still autumn night, with the quiet stars overhead, the feeling seemed to grow upon him. Under other circumstances, his subtle brain would have devised a means of escape, or worked out some ingenious scheme for avoiding the dreaded tête-à-tête; but now, with that strange man keeping so unpleasantly close to his side, he walked along the silent streets as if obeying some motive-power entirely foreign to his own.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### FATHER AND SON.

Nor many words were exchanged between Mark and his companion until they reached the middle of Waterloo Bridge, when the stranger made a sudden halt, saying, "No use my going any farther with you: I find that motion puts me out of breath for talking; and this place will suit us as well as anywhere else, perhaps better—I don't think we are in any danger from intruders."

As he spoke, he leaned his arm on the parapet of the bridge, and laughed a low, curious laugh

that made Mark shiver. At that moment the measured tramp of a policeman echoed through the stillness, and after an interval a drunken man reeled past, half supported by his wife, a frail, miserable-looking woman, whose physical strength seemed ill-fitted for the task she had undertaken, of guiding his uncertain steps. The light of one of the bridge lamps flashed for an instant on her worn face, and the sound of the husband's voice was heard in a few broken sentences of maudlin tenderness to the patient, much-enduring creature at his side. But the two men on the bridge neither saw nor heard them. They had other matters to engross their attention.

"Mr. Mark Danson."

He started at the sound of his name; then recollecting the card-case he had dropped during the evening, he guessed how the stranger had obtained that knowledge. The latter seemed to divine his thoughts.

"You are aware how I got hold of your name, but before that I had my suspicions about you, and once or twice I felt tempted to throw up the game; for some how it didn't sit easy on my conscience playing with you; but the old fever was on me, so I stuck to it, and here I am."

"So I perceive," returned Mark, with the nearest approach to a sneer that he felt it safe to indulge; "but I should like to be told why you press your society upon me in this persistent way, when you know that the honor is not appreciated. It is extraordinary; in fact, scarcely the conduct of a sane man. If you had been drinking, it might be easy to account for it; but perhaps your bad luck has made you desperate."

"Perhaps it has, or I should not be here; but there's an excuse for any thing I may do to-night."

As he spoke, his eyes fell on the dark river gleaming beneath them. Mark followed the direction of his glance with a visible shrinking from him, and an involuntary clutch of the stone wall. His companion understood the movement, and replied, in a tone of strong contempt, "You need not be afraid for yourself, you are safe from that," pointing over the bridge; "desperate as I may be, I did not come here to do murder."

"Murder!" repeated Mark, with a start, "if I had a thought of that I would seek the protection of the police. What made you suspect that I thought so?"

"Your own manner, and the look of your craven face," muttered the man, who, as the reader is aware, was no other than the visitor to the artist's studio, to whose important disclosure Charles Rivers owed the discovery of his parentage. Mark chose to ignore the taunt thus conveyed, for, in spite of his assurance, he did not covet a quarrel with his strange acquaintance of the gaming-house. There was a pause, which seemed to give him courage.

"I suppose your object is to extort money from me," he began, but was interrupted by the stranger suddenly grasping his arm.

"Extort money from you! how will it be if I tell you that you have a right to supply my wants?"

"A right!" echoed Mark, inclined to laugh at the singularity of the idea: "that sounds as if you were jesting; perhaps I might enjoy it if you would release my arm, I have a strong objection to this kind of handling."

But the man still kept his hold. "You must waive that objection until you hear what I have made up my mind to tell. Listen; a few words will solve the enigma that puzzles you. The right I mean is that of a rich son to befriend a father who has not a guinea to call his own. Now do we understand each other, or does it still sound like a jest?"

"You must be mad," burst out Mark, making a violent effort to shake off his grasp.

The man laughed bitterly.

"Truly this is a filial recognition; but we can not alter the truth, however unpleasant it may be. Whether you like it or not, I am George Mark Danson, instead of George Bland, as I have called myself since I came to England. Did it never occur to you that your father might be living?"

He dropped Mark's arm as he spoke, and the young man reeled as if he had received a blow.

"No, no! I don't believe it! After all these years, why should he come back to be a clog and disgrace to me?"

The man leaned heavily against the parapet, keeping his darkened face turned towards the river. If there had been light enough, Mark would have seen the strange look which had come there, a keen, suffering look, as if there was a struggle to fight down something. His lips quivered as he said, slowly, "But as your father has come back, what will you do?"

"Disown him and his claim; he has no business to come in my way now and mar my prospects; he has sunk too low to be any thing to me."

A low groan answered him.

"Oh, Margaret! my wife—my wife! you are revenged at last."

He took off his hat and let the breeze blow through his gray hairs. Then he turned upon Mark. "However much I deserve my punishment, it should not come from you. Is this the fruit of Daniel Cawton's teaching? No, I will not believe it; though hard and prond, he was always just. The bad was in you and he could not drive it out. I should like to tell him where I found his nephew to-night, and show him what his successor will be."

These words brought a new terror to Mark; he plunged his hand into his pocket, and the chink of gold was heard as he said, hurriedly, "No, no! you must not think of troubling my uncle, that would do no good to yourself. I will give you money—far more than you have lost to-night, and double the sum a month from this date, if you will only consent to go away out of sight and knowledge."

He held out his hand, but it was struck aside

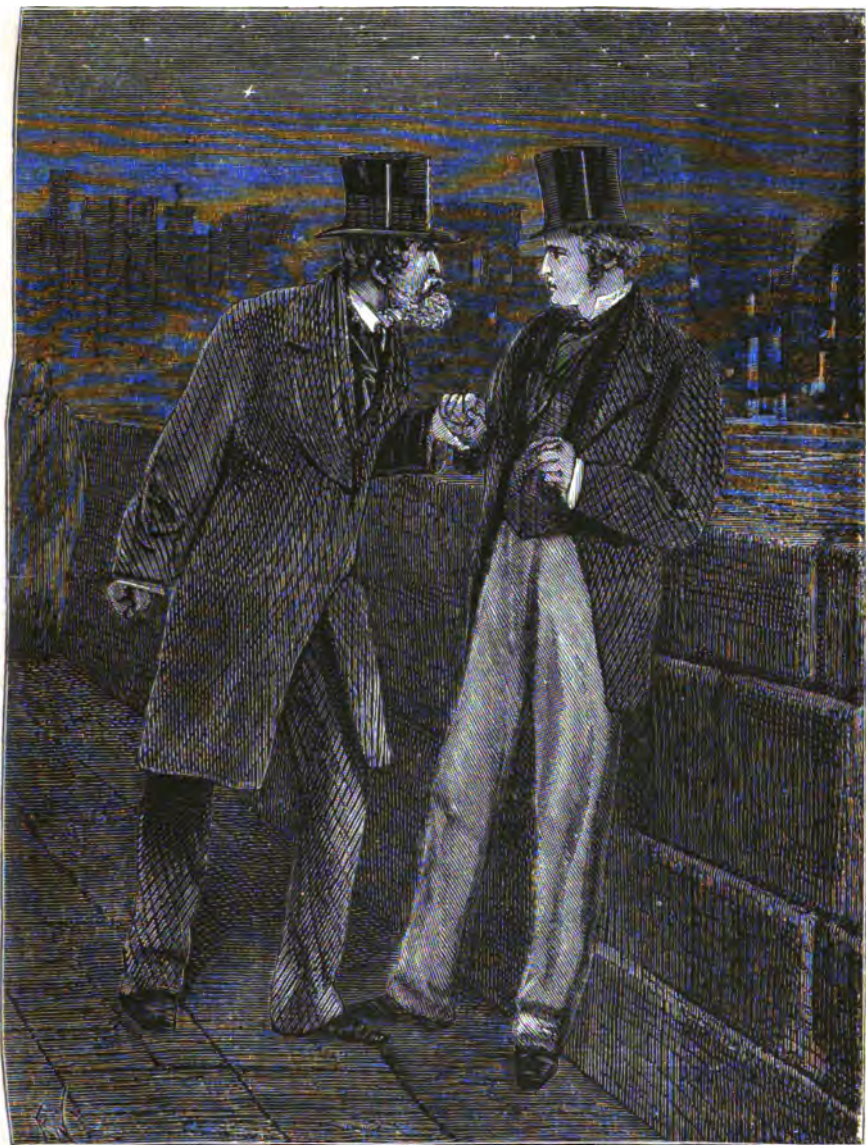


so rudely that some of the money rolled on the pavement.

"You want to buy me off, because you are afraid of what I may say. Take back your money; if I want alms I can beg from others. My son as you are, I hate you for your likeness to myself; but you are even a greater villain,

"No, no, low 'as I am, I will not be bought with your money. If you had been different you might have reformed me from the old life, which I would fain bury with its sins. But now I want nothing more to say to you; my talk must be to Daniel Crawton."

So they parted, father and son. Mark staid



"You must be mad," burst out Mark.

for you are a hypocrite, and pass for what you are not. I am thankful now that my baby-girl went to the grave with her mother, for she might have grown up like you."

Again Mark ventured to repeat his offer, but with the same result.

behind on the bridge, looking down into the river as it ran, and brooding over those last words which were torture to him, muttering to himself, "Talk to Daniel Crawton!" How the meshes of his evil acts were closing round him. There was the secret of his marriage; then

Giles Royton with his knowledge of the wrong to Hugh: were not these enough, without having this new sting planted in his life?

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### A BROTHER'S GIFT.

"MR. CHARLES RIVERS, can I have a word with you?"

"As many as may please your ladyship. This is your own day, and you are privileged to make any request you like, Miss May Rivers." And the young painter turned from his easel, threw down his brushes, and laughingly faced the intruder, feeding his artist's love of beauty by letting his gaze linger on the charming vision which had invaded his solitude—a little fairy-like figure in a dress of delicate summer muslin, that added something to its cool, airy grace, and an arch gypsy face that vainly tried to look demure under the shade of the coquetish straw hat with its wreath of green leaves.

May had just come in from the garden, bringing with her a delicious draught of morning air, laden with innumerable flower scents, which seemed to float about her as she untied her hat and shook back the tangled shower of curls which had been blown about her face. She said, gayly, "The wind has not a bit of respect for me. See what sad liberties it has taken with my hair. This would be quite a nervous irritant to my dear old auntie;" and May tripped up to the mantel-glass with the view of arranging her refractory tresses, but she was stopped by Charles.

"Don't fasten up your curls, May; they suit you better down. If I could only count upon your sitting still long enough to make a model, I should like to paint you as you look now."

"Thank you, Mr. Charles; but my humble opinion is, that you might be much better employed painting somebody else of your acquaintance." Here she gave him a demure side-glance, conveying so much meaning that the gentleman looked conscious in spite of himself, though he affected to be absorbed in doing something to the point of a drawing-pencil, which just then seemed to require most minute attention.

It was a marvel to Charles Rivers how quickly and easily he had been able to adapt himself to his new position; but, more than all, the intimacy which had grown up between himself and his newly-found sister, the perfect unity of feeling and sympathy which so soon made a bond between them, and the manner in which he had won his way at once to the warm young heart, and made himself a place there. On her side, May had been prepared to take kindly to him, for his presence satisfied one of her old childish longings; as she often told him, she had been all her life wishing for a big, handsome brother to take care of her.

Charles had removed from his apartments at No. 21, the house in the melancholy terrace,

where he had received the memorable visits of the stranger calling himself George Bland. His first intention had been to furnish a villa at Hampstead, but Aunt Lydia had instantly taken alarm, foreseeing that he might want to have his sister to preside over the household, and she could not bear the thought of separation from her darling. So at her earnest solicitation, powerfully supported by May (who was oddly divided between love for her aunt and the growing affection for her new brother), he consented to resign his idea for a time, and accept the proposal to make one of their family circle. So it came to pass that Charles took up his present quarters in the roomy old-fashioned country house, which had been May's first home in England, and where she had spent her school holidays (which meant being periodically spoiled by her aunt—so lofty Miss Beckfield had been wont to assert, after each return of her wayward pupil). Here the young man settled down, after that interview with Margaret Crawton in which he made his unsuccessful appeal, and received her decision respecting the delay of their marriage. And he eventually became such a favorite of Aunt Lydia's, that May often protested that she was growing jealous of him. He was still devoted to his art, and painted pictures with as much untiring industry as though his daily bread still depended on his professional gains. Margaret Crawton was right; her lover was ambitious; but it was not now, as it had been, one of her shadows. The old doubts were dispelled; she was cured of her secret distrust, and the jealousy which had grown out of it; for, in these later days, her woman's heart had learned to read him by another and a truer light.

"So you are quite reconciled to your new studio; does the light suit your highness?"

"Yes, dear May."

"I am glad of that; for I know you painters are very hard to please on that point."

So prattled May, as she fluttered restlessly about the room. Settling at last by the side of Charles, she took up a half-finished sketch, saying, "Do show me some of your beautiful faces; they are always such a treat! The sight of them seems to feed my fancy as well as my eyes; for they seem to me like embodied poems. Do you know, Mr. Artist, I am almost inclined to envy you the power of creating forms of loveliness? I look upon beauty as such a precious thing, second to nothing—"

"Except goodness, little sister; and that is beauty of a higher kind," he interrupted, in a low, thoughtful tone. "We must not forget that there are beautiful lives as well as faces."

As he spoke, his thoughts involuntarily turned to Margaret's mother as an illustration, for he cherished an almost filial love and reverence for gentle Mrs. Crawton.

"Well, May, you have kept me waiting long enough for this all-important word, which I was led to understand you wanted to have with me; and I have also a query to propound concerning

that mysterious piece of paper which you keep so carefully concealed in your hand, without pity for my unsatisfied curiosity; if I had been a young lady, I could not have waited so long for an explanation."

May laughed a joyous, silvery peal, that rang out from her full, red lips, rippling through the room like the trill of a skylark. Charles always liked to hear May laugh; there was such girlish freedom and abandonment in her mirth.

She held the paper playfully behind her, exclaiming, "You deserve to be punished for that libellous speech, sir; but you know that you have a chance of being spoiled because I am not yet used to the novelty of having a brother. But wait until I become intimate with *somebody*, then I will take my revenge by publishing your shortcomings."

Again the conscious look, which betrayed so much to his tormentor, particularly as he had no drawing-pencil to fall back upon. He contented himself with saying, "You are only a silly little girl, May, though I suspect you claim to be quite a sage woman now, by virtue of your twenty-one years. But, now for your word; pray when am I to be enlightened?"

"Well, sir, it relates to this paper, about which I am seeking information, which I am sure you can give if you please. Translate for me the meaning of this;" and she placed in his hands a folded paper, averting her face that he might not see that tears were glistening in her eyes.

"This," he repeated, turning it over in well-feigned surprise; "where did you find it, May?"

"You know very well; between the leaves of the album of views, which you gave me this morning as a birthday present. Now I suspect that it was merely to be the vehicle of that costlier gift," pointing to the paper in his hand, her wet eyelashes drooping lower on her glowing cheeks, as she added, "and I want to know what you mean by it, Charles."

He took one of the long, dusky curls, and smoothed it round his fingers, as he said, softly, "Mean by what, May? if you are alluding to this paper, I answer that it represents only a simple act of justice, such as would have been done by any one possessing a single spark of honor or right feeling."

The paper in question was a deed of gift, duly executed and signed by Charles Rivers, conveying to his half-sister May a considerable share of the fortune which he had inherited as his father's heir.

"What! tears on your birthday, May; it must be because you are leaving behind your girlhood."

Thus detected, May made no further attempt at disguise. "No—no," she faltered; "it is this paper, and the thought of you, by your own free act, dividing your birthright with me."

"And why not, little sister? unless you put me down as a living embodiment of selfishness and greed, who would gather all the good to himself; besides, it is nothing but my duty.

My father died in the belief that all his wealth would descend to you as his only child. These were your prospects; was it nothing for you to be called upon to resign them to a stranger, just when you were about to take your place in society, and might be expected to have learned the value of money, and all that it will secure? Do you know, May, if you had been other than you are, you might have hated me for making my appearance on the scene, and coming between you and a brilliant future, such as would be likely to captivate the fancy of most young women?"

"Charles, I shall be obliged to quarrel with you if you go on talking in that strain. What matter about wealth and a brilliant future? Why need I care to sit perched on the mountain-top, if I can be happier in the valley? it gets its share of sunshine, and it is sheltered from the storm-winds. There, I am positively growing poetical; but you provoked me, just as my guardian does, preaching up the value of money, as though it contained in itself every thing needful. Now it is my turn to enumerate. Is it nothing to become possessed of what I have sighed for all my life—a brother to torment and tease? Not that I mean you to take any praise to yourself on that account, Mr. Charles—I dare say you need improvement in many ways—but, such as you are, I would not give you up to be three times an heiress."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, May; at the same time it confirms my suspicion, that you have not an ounce of worldly wisdom to weigh against all your warm-hearted impulsiveness—though you were the ward of that cynical old merchant, Daniel Crawton. How did it happen that your mind escaped receiving some of its color from his?"

"Very easily, seeing that I was always in awe of him, and made a point of seeking his society as little as I could possibly help; and as my visits gave him more trouble than satisfaction, our avoidance was mutual. But that was in my ignorant days, when I had not sense to discriminate. I have lately made discoveries concerning my guardian, which convince me that my judgment of him was greatly in error."

"Indeed; how?"

"In the first place, I don't believe in his cynical cuts at human nature, for I think it is all employed as a disguise for feelings that go deeper than most people's. The truth is that he is a character of a very original sort. It may take us great trouble to get to his heart, but if we can only manage to break away some of the queer rugged crust which has grown round it, we shall find it tender as a woman's; and I think that is the reason why his keen, wise head invented the plan of hiding it under such defenses—for he suffered in early life. I heard the story from Aunt Lydia, and it has drawn me to him more than I can tell."

"What was it?" Charles asked, with increasing interest.

May's eyes softened, and her voice had be-

come strangely subdued. He wondered at the change in her manner, for he never remembered to have seen such a grave cast of thought on that bright face.

She went on: "It is a love story, Charles, and it sounds to me almost like a poem of the old days of knights and chivalry, only here the actors and circumstances are so different. Perhaps you do not know that, hard as he seems now, Daniel Crawton was the sole support of his relations, even before the death of his father. Aunt Lydia says the Crawtons were an old family, very proud and poor. There was not much for any of them, but the eldest gave up his share to be divided between his sister and brother, and left home to fight his own way and theirs, for he was always helping them."

"But the love story," put in Charles, with some repressed eagerness.

"I am coming to it," said May, softly. "I did not know, until I learnt it from Aunt Lydia, that there was a reason why Broombank had never found a mistress, and why Daniel Crawton lived lonely all his life—a reason that I should never have guessed. He loved, in early days, a young lady who had been left to his father's care—almost worshipped her, it was said; but it was not returned, for she only gave him the regard of a sister; still he persevered, and might have succeeded, but his younger brother came in his way and crossed him—though he pretended not to care for the girl, at the same time that he was doing all he could to win her. The elder Crawton had to go away, but judging his brother by himself, and trusting him, he left his cause in his hands; the end was, that he lost her, and she became his brother's wife. Do you guess who it is?" continued May, with some slight hesitation. "The mother of your Margaret."

"I thought so," murmured Charles.

His sister went on: "After that, the families drifted apart, and Aunt Lydia lost all knowledge of the other branch, except that she heard the brothers had quarrelled, and separated for life. That is all," she concluded, "but it has given me a key to the old man's true nature, and I am sorry now that I ever judged him hardly. Yet, Charles, there is one thing I wish to mention to you: that I fancy you don't like my guardian."

"It would be wrong to say I dislike him, May: he has certain traits of character that I admire, and we have many ideas and sympathies in common; but I can not reconcile myself to his treatment of his nephew Hugh; true, he did not prosecute the one who once saved his life in a street accident, but he set his face against him, and sent him forth with the sort of ban upon him that was sure to put him down, as effectually as if a foot had been really set upon his neck to crush him. It is that which always comes between me and Daniel Crawton." And Charles, who had worked himself into a great heat, got up and walked about the room in a manner that was characteristic of him when

excited. That was why he did not notice the peculiar expression of May's face, while he talked about his friend Hugh. The bright eyes dimmed, and when she spoke her lips quivered.

"Yet you may believe, Charles, that it is a sore trouble to my guardian; and I, too, am grieved about your friend. I have already given my verdict in his favor, and I should not change it, even if this sad business were never cleared; and if I knew him well enough I should like to tell him so—that is, if it would not hurt his feelings, and—and—I could be sure he would not think it a—*a liberty on my part*;" and conscious that she was somehow involving herself in a manner that she did not intend, May faltered and blushed, and sought a diversion by ruthlessly crumpling the ends of her muslin sash.

But Charles, who had been silently drawing conclusions, increased her embarrassment by suddenly pausing in his walk, and mercilessly placing himself opposite to her, as he said, "Poor Hugh, I should be very glad if we could do any thing to help to lighten his trouble."

"For Margaret's sake?" interrogated May, shyly.

"Yes, and for his own; I have great regard for Hugh Crawton."

"How strange it has all happened," said his sister, designedly changing the subject. "To think of your choice being fixed on my guardian's niece, and yourself turning out to be the painter of that very picture, 'For Weal or Woe,' which he took me purposely to see: Do you know, Charles, I fell in love with Margaret the first time I saw her at the Academy? But for yourself," she added, laughing, "I don't believe that I noticed you at all."

They talked some time longer, until they heard the rustle of Aunt Lydia's stiff silk in the passage.

"I shall not soon forget our conversation on your twenty-first birthday, little sister," he said, significantly.

"Nor shall I," replied May, looking wistfully at the paper which he had given back to her.

"It is not likely that I shall forget my dear brother's gift."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### "CAN IT BE DONE?"

"WELL, Danson, what's in the wind now?"

"Just take a turn with me round the square, and I will tell you, Fred."

"All right; but isn't it rather early for us? Won't you be afraid of meeting some of your people?"

"Hardly in this quarter; besides, I know the governor will be safe in the library at Broombank by this time, poring over his books or pictures."

"Ah! very well, then we're safe, and I'm your servant, good for at least a couple of hours



before there'll be any thing worth my attention in a place you know of," and the speaker nodded significantly as he took out his cigar-case, and helped himself to its contents, at the same time handing it to his friend.

"No, thank you, Fred, I'm not in the humor for smoking just now; and if I were, my cigar-case is quite full without taking yours."

"Well, suppose it is, they mayn't be of so good a sort, though you do happen to own more of the circulating medium than a needy fellow, whom you may put down as living on his wits."

"Be that as it may," struck in the other, dryly, "we're surely not going to be a couple of asses, and get up a quarrel about the quality of our cigars. I tell you what, Fred, you're a regular piece of spontaneous combustion, ready to explode at the least touch."

At this the first speaker laughed with returning good-humor, and the two young men linked arms and passed together into the shaded obscurity of the silent square, almost deserted at that hour, except for now and then the stopping of a carriage at the door of one of the tall houses, the occasional passing of a pedestrian, and the periodical visitation of the policeman on his rounds. So they walked with the tranquil stars of the summer night gleaming down upon them, and the full-leaved trees nodding and swaying over their path, casting dense, dark masses of shadow here and there. At last the two came to a sudden halt, and, standing on one of those patches of gloom where the trees grew thickest, continued their low-voiced, earnest talk. Mark Danson, evidently pursuing some argument, which he now and then found it necessary to enforce by eager gestures. The young man whom he had called Fred threw away the end of his cigar, and inserted his hands in his pockets, making a jingling noise with their contents. It was easy to fix the exact social stratum to which he belonged; easy also to speculate about his pursuits and habits, the sort of life he led, and the people with whom he fraternized. The indelible stamp had fixed itself upon him, showing in his style of dress, and the loose, reckless swing of the body in his careless, uneven walk—sometimes cropping out even in the tone of thought and speech. Yet it was certainly not a face of the bad, forbidding type. There might be signs of weakness, with lamentable infirmity of purpose, and the want of refinement which is born of coarse, lowering associations, and the inevitable working of debasing influences on a character; but there was nothing sensual nor cruel in the expression of the lips and eyes—nothing sinister nor cunning about the slightly-open mouth. It was that kind of plastic material which vice most easily shapes and moulds to its own likeness. Yet, on the other hand, there was nothing about Fred Dalton to forbid the hope that he might be reclaimed for nobler things, and fitted to live a better life.

Mark Danson looked haggard and anxious as he stood against the iron railing of the enclos-

ure; his colorless face showing strongly against the background of shadow cast by the trees.

"Come, Danson, I can't tell what's the matter with you to-night, you seem so dreadfully put out; worse than I should be even if I'd lost money on every race through the season, and had a run of ill-luck every night into the bargain."

"Well, granted that I am," returned Mark, biting his lips, "I never pretended to say that you and I were alike, Dalton. For instance, your light brain would give way under less than half of what is racking mine to-night. The truth is, my dear fellow (and he laid his hand on his companion's shoulder with a touch of patronage), if you'd been in my place, you would have gone to the wall long since—that is, betrayed yourself, and paid the forfeit of your ill-doings. You do very well to follow a lead, but you are not intended for the whip-hand."

Fred Dalton seemed to find something very amusing in his friend's way of putting the argument, for he laughed good-humoredly as he replied, "I don't know about the whip-hand, Danson; perhaps you'd have altered your opinion if you'd seen me the other day helping Harry Seymour to drive—"

Here he was interrupted with a gesture of irritable impatience.

"Pshaw, Fred! don't be an idiot. I didn't mean you to take me literally. Can't you understand a figure of speech? But enough of this talk, that means nothing. We have no time to waste, so let us come to the point. I want you to do me an important service—important at least to me—a bit of work that entails no risk, and only requires caution and tact. I sought you out among all my acquaintance as the fit person, but just now you irritated me by asking, 'If it could be done?' after I had shown you the why and wherefore, and given some instructions as to ways and means. Do you still hesitate?"

"Well, not exactly; that is, I can not tell," said Fred, as usual floundering feebly in the middle of a half-formed good resolution; for what he had of moral sense and reflection seemed to revolt against that which his friend Danson required of him.

Mark glared savagely on the unconscious Fred, though his voice was smooth and persuasive when he spoke, taking hold of his coat-sleeve as if to impress his reasoning upon him. "Look here, Dalton, you complain that you are short of cash."

"That I am," murmured the other, in an injured tone; "and how I am to get clear through this quarter is more than I can—"

"Now don't go on grumbling in that fashion," interrupted Mark, "but listen to me. You are aware, that I hold (on your account) several important bits of paper, in the form of I O U's, which give me a pretty heavy claim against your exchequer—in fact, under present circumstances, it would almost ruin you, if I came down upon you with a sudden demand to pay up."

"That it would," assented Fred ruefully, taking off his hat to let the cool breeze blow on his forehead, which had grown hot at the mere suggestion of such a probability; adding, hurriedly, "but, Danson, surely you don't mean to be that hard against a fellow."

"I can not say what I might be, if the good was put upon me. I am only willing to serve those that serve me; but let that pass. When I first mentioned this business, I made you what I call a very handsome offer, not only to cancel my present claims against you, but to give you a further advance towards meeting that bill which you say you will be obliged to take up next week."

The young man uttered an exclamation that sounded almost like a groan, looking helplessly at the pale face of his tempter—the man whom his wretched money necessities had made his master for the present.

He answered, in a half-faltering, hesitating way, "Well, Danson, about this matter of yours. You say that you've explained; but for all that I don't clearly understand, except that you want me to find a certain person, and get him away from London as quick as possible. You talk as if it could be managed as easily as lighting one's cigar, but I don't see it; though I'm willing to do all I can to oblige you, Danson; yet the fact is, from what little I know of the party in question, I'm not sure that it can be done at all."

Mark spoke with strong contempt. "Away with your moonish fears and fancies, Fred Dalton! I shall begin to put you down as little better than an old woman and think I've made a sad mistake in applying to you. What has come over you, man? Have you played away your pluck as well as your money and brains?"

If there had been light enough, he would have seen a sudden flash kindle in the sunken blue eyes of his companion, who answered, angrily, "Hold there, Danson; if I do owe you money, I'm not booked to take any insult you may choose to give. You have prospects which I have not, backed by cash, social respectability, and all the rest. I remember that we've agreed not to know each other if we chance to meet in the daylight; but for all these odds between us, I come from a family as good as yours, though I've brought it no credit. But whatever I may be, Danson, I'm not a deception or sham."

Mark winced at this, as he always did at any thing bold and defiant, either in the form of resistance or attack. He had neither the wish nor intention to quarrel with his friend; just then it would not suit his plans. So he set himself to work to lull the transient tempest as he well knew how.

"Fugh, Dalton! what a tiresome fellow you are! I might be plotting some very desperate undertaking for you; nothing less than burglary with violence, or an incendiary fire. You must admit that it is enough to provoke one to be met in that way."

Then Fred, easily mollified and influenced,

laughed in the midst of a grumbling protest that he had no liking for the affair.

"Nor have I, so far as that goes, Dalton; but the thing must be managed, for the sake of circumstances, of which you could make nothing even if I entered into particulars. But look you, my dear fellow, as you have such scruples, I give you my word that the adventure will bring no harm to Bland or any one else. It is simply that his presence in town is inconvenient just now, and may work me more ill than you can guess. So I want him to have country air, and take a journey for his own good and mine."

"Is it law business?" queried Fred with a dubious look.

"Something of the sort," returned Mark, evasively, fidgeting with his watch-chain, adding, hurriedly, "I repeat that I intend no injury to the man himself; there will be no need to use violence of any kind. It can be easily done in the way I suggested, and will rather tend to his benefit in the end, for I've reason to know that his funds are not extensive."

Fred Dalton never troubled himself about undercurrents in the motives and actions of those with whom he was brought into contact. He had never been a reasoner, and it was not his habit to follow out processes of thought, or try to make logical deductions; so he accepted Mark's words in his own literal fashion, and said—

"Well, in that case I don't so much mind lending you a hand, and will take your word that it's all fair and straight as you say. I don't hang back from confessing to you, Danson, the reason why I had such a dislike to meddle in this. When I first got acquainted with Bland, I was awfully hard up, and he had just got a lump of money for something. Well, the truth is, he gave me a friendly lift, and sooner than make an ill return for it, I'd let debts and duns take their chance, and all the bills as well. He rarely touches cards now," he went on, reflectively; "but I think I know where he can be found. What time do you give me?"

Mark mused a moment, then said, "Not much; if done at all it must be quickly, or it will be no use. Let me see, this is Tuesday," adding, as if to himself, "to-morrow and Thursday the old man is away, so there will be no danger. Well, then, on Friday, Fred, not later, I will meet you at our usual place at the old time, and I shall expect you to be ready to receive your promised recompense. I dare say you will not be sorry to get rid of the fear of that bill," he concluded with a crafty smile.

A few minutes more, and the two separated, going their different ways, Mark with a satisfied look in his eyes, as if he had done a good stroke of business, and was already forecasting the successful issue, as he was whirling along in a cab to the railway station, to catch the last train to Broombank, where he would let himself in with his own key, by the private garden gate, as he often did when the household were in bed. If the uncle chanced to hear of these late hours,

his nephew, who studied the proprieties so correctly, could quickly set all inquiries at rest by a few grave allusions to certain meetings or scientific lectures which he professed to be in the habit of attending.

And his companion—there was no speculating with any certainty about his movements for the night,—reckless, prodigal, gambling Fred Dalton, who was no one's enemy but his own. It was sad to see that kindly, frank nature under the spoiling process; sad to see the noxious growth of choking tares overrunning the soil that might have been so rich in good seeds.

He looked after Mark until he could see him no longer, then he went on shaking his head and muttering, "Somehow, I've my doubts about this affair; I hope it's all right, but that Danson has such a way of glossing over things. Then he keeps his cards back, and shows no more than he can help. What has that man to do with him? I must try to find out. He's about old enough to be my father, or his, and he's broken down and poor. Hang it! I shouldn't like to find afterwards that I had lent my hand to do him any harm; but in any case it seems like interfering with the liberty of the British subject, and I don't at all relish the idea."

With this conclusion, Fred went his way.

## CHAPTER XL.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

HUGH CRAWTON sat up late, long after the outside doors were locked, the fires gone out, and all the little household, as he thought, reposing in bed. He remained alone and wakeful, gazing before him into the cold void of the empty fire-grate, with his head resting on his hand, thinking sad, yearning thoughts about the future, and the path that was unfolding itself to him; for he had made up his mind to accept a proposal of emigration which had been made to him by Mark Danson, and turn his back on the old country, at least for a time, until he had earned enough to ensure ease and comfort for the loved ones at home. Then his thoughts went back over the past three years which had seemed to hold such fair promise for him; and he recalled the last dreadful day in Daniel Crawton's office, counting up the weary, hopeless months which had passed since then—counting with a sort of vague wonder that he had dragged through so many.

He sat surrounded by signs of the day's interests and occupations—familiar home details, mutely telling the story of the gentle lives of toil and self-denial that were lived there, but which he scarcely noticed then, because he was so used to their homely, every-day aspect, unconscious how they would linger in his mind, and be always fitted in with the impressions of that night. His gaze had singled out his mother's chair and footstool, and there was her sew-

ing just as she had left it, neatly folded on her work-basket.

Looking thus, he seemed to see her still sitting there, with her pure spiritual face, bands of soft brown hair streaked with gray, and the tender mouth wearing its old expression of resigned sweetness. So he would always see her, even when miles of heaving ocean billows rolled and surged between them; but now he resolutely turned away his eyes, for the vision brought him a dull heartache, and a choking thought about the parting which he believed to be now so near. Once he caught sight of something lying on the floor near her chair, as though she had dropped it in getting up, for he knew at once that it belonged to his mother: a tiny silk handkerchief, which he remembered to have often seen her wearing about her neck. The color was faded, and the fringe frayed out here and there, and when he picked it up and examined it, his heart swelled to see how shabby it was; but he folded it carefully in the well-worn creases, and gathered it to himself with a sort of hungering, yearning tenderness, resolving that it should go with him across the seas, and be henceforth hoarded away as a dearly-treasured relic. Not that he would need it to keep his mother's memory green in his heart, but he thought it would comfort him to look at in that unknown land where there would be none but strange faces near him. He would take it out at times, when the home-sickness was on him, and his courage grew faint, and when the fight with fortune seemed too hard. Then the tiny thing would seem to him like a message of strength and patience from his mother, whom he would think of as praying for him at home; and he would make that his flag of victory, just as the old knights of chivalry used to ride into battle wearing the colors of the ladies they loved best.

As these fancies crowded on Hugh's mind, the moisture gathered under his dark eyelashes, and he wondered how much he would be missed outside the narrow circle of his own home; and a vivid streak of color flushed into his cheeks, as his thoughts turned longingly to the face that still kept its shrine in his memory, and he asked himself the question, whether she in her world—which seemed so far removed from his—would ever step aside from her sheltered life of luxury and ease, to give a passing thought of inquiry about the distant exile? When he first heard the wonderful news of his friend Charles's relationship to May Rivers, there had sprung up a wild hope that it might possibly be a link between them; but many things had since arisen to crush it down, and now he recollected, gloomily, that he was going away, to drop out of her knowledge, leaving her free to love and marry and forget that he ever existed.

At that point in his meditations, Hugh heard the handle of the door turn, then became conscious of a sudden waft of cool air from the passage, and, without turning round, knew that it was his sister Margaret. She came in softly.

closing the door after her, and stealing to the back of his chair, leaned over him and laid her cool hand on his head, murmuring, "Poor, Hugh; why don't you go to bed?"

He roused himself, and smiled. "For a good reason—because I am not inclined to sleep; but I may ask you the same question, for I thought

tion of her face. There were dim, purple lines under her eyes, as if from recent crying, and the white lids looked as though some weary weight were crushing them down, while the proudly curved lips, that usually looked so resolute—as if they could bear any thing, had a trembling expression of pain that was new to



"Poor Hugh!"

you had been dreaming for hours. I hope you have not one of your old headaches," he added, anxiously. "Come round and let me look at you, Madge."

She obeyed, finding herself a seat on a stool near him, but visibly shrinking from his inspec-

them. Charles had noted it, on his last visit, with a passing pang that Margaret should have any wound which he could not heal; for he knew that she was grieving about her brother and his proposed departure. But to the honor of the lover it may be recorded that he was not

jealous of this appropriation of her affections, nor did it grow into a shadow of discontent, as it might have done in the old days of doubt and misapprehension. It would have pleased him to be able to place some of his wealth at the service of her family; but he could not: the Crawtons were so sensitive and proud.

A look of sorrowful intelligence passed between the brother and sister. It was no secret to Hugh that she had been keeping a tearful vigil, and he quickly divined the cause.

"Dear Madge," he said, fondly using the familiar pet name of their childhood, and leaning forward to touch the crown of dark hair which adorned her fine, classic-looking head; "dear Madge, you can't hide it from me if you try. I know you are grieving for me—your good-for-nothing brother." He smiled a wan smile at this self-deprecation. "Yes, grieving for me; but you must not, darling, for I want you to bear up for the sake of the dear mother up stairs. She will need you, and your strength; for I notice that she is getting older and weaker; it never showed itself so plainly to me as it did to-night."

Here there was a trembling break in his voice, and he dropped back into his old attitude in the chair, adding, after a pause, "I shall leave her to your love, sister—a sacred charge—but I know it will be well kept; for though you have been giving way to-night, you can be a brave woman if you try."

"Yes, Hugh; if the necessity comes I can and will."

There was a clear, strong ring of resolution in the young voice, though the lips that spoke had still the suffering look.

"Thanks for those words, sister," he said, brokenly, "and if—we are never to meet again in this world, you may know that—I—shall—always bless you for what you will be doing."

## CHAPTER XLI.

### "IS THERE NO OTHER WAY?"

AFTER the conversation recorded in the last chapter, there was a short interval of most expressive silence. The little clock on the mantel told off the seconds with a low, hurried tick, as though it were in haste to get through them, and had some instinct of sympathy with the burden of sorrow which those speeding minutes held for the two quiet figures sitting by the hearth.

"You guess rightly, Hugh," said Margaret, at length; "I am grieving over this new purpose which you have formed; for, try as I will, I can not realize that it will be for your good, and I can not bring myself to believe in the cruel necessity which forces you to make this choice. It should only be the last extremity that could divide us, brother; surely there must be some hope left for you here at home. Say

you will think better of it, and decide not to leave England."

He turned upon her a face full of keen distress, saying, "Oh, Margaret, don't—don't make this thing so hard for me. It has cost a sore struggle to make up my mind; but I have done it because I think it will be for the best."

"But is there no other way?" murmured Margaret, still pleading with her great eyes raised mournfully to his face.

He sighed. "None that I can see, Margaret. You know how repeatedly I have tried and failed. No, no, I must go; it is the only chance left me. I must take it, and face the future with all the courage I can. The struggle could not have lasted longer. I should feel myself something worse than a coward, if I could stay on at home, a burden upon those whose breadwinner I ought to be; idle, while you and mother are wearing out your lives with work. The very feeling would choke me, and I should deserve it all, if I could so misuse the gifts of health and strength which God has given me. And I know you would not like me to do it, Margaret, for you could not retain respect for your brother if you saw him willfully wasting his life, and rusting out like a useless old sword. But I have another argument," he added, looking wistfully at her. "Innocent as I know myself to be, the unexplained mystery of that missing two hundred pounds, and my uncle's dreadful words, haunt me like a nightmare; perhaps I shall be able to fight it down in the new land; for work, Madge, hard work, is a good antidote for mental trouble."

"Oh, Hugh, my brother," she moaned; "to think of going away like this; and we may never know who it is that has worked us all this misery. Uncle Daniel is getting very old; would you like to see him before you leave?"

Hugh's lips quivered with pain as he said hastily, "No, Margaret, I would not willingly stand in his presence again, unless I could give him back that charge with proofs of its falsehood. He passed me the other day in his carriage, and I caught sight of his face; it seemed to me stern and hard like a face cut in stone. I don't know that he saw me, but if he did, he gave no sign. Oh! Margaret, I can not tell you how anxious I was to stand high in his esteem; it may be that I set undue value and strove too much for what would, after all, have been only a human estimate. God forgive me, if I erred;" and true to his mother's teachings, Hugh bowed his head with a prayerful impulse which had in it something of her own chastened spirit.

"If we could only find some clue to the mystery," said Margaret, breaking the silence that followed.

"In any case, I shall leave friends to watch over my interests," returned Hugh, hastily. "Giles Royton, for one, has been always friendly to me. By-the-by, Margaret, it just strikes me as rather singular that though you and Eleanor were such friends, I never knew her father



until I saw him, for the first time, in Uncle Daniel's office."

"Not so singular, when I tell you that he is little more than a stranger to me, for he always seemed to live his life apart, and is seldom home in the evenings. I think, sometimes, that must be poor Nelly's skeleton; but let us talk about yourself, Hugh; you were saying that you would leave friends to watch over your interests."

"Yes, in the event of any thing occurring to throw light on that strange affair, Cousin Mark has promised to watch the investigation for me."

"Cousin Mark!" repeated the sister with a strong expression of dissatisfaction. "How often have I tried to put you on your guard against him! yet you still go on trusting and believing in him."

"I can not understand why you have been against him from the first, Margaret. I really think that you are sometimes too severe upon him."

"I dislike him because I have the feeling, of which I can not divest myself, that he is not what he seems; and this sort of involuntary dislike, not always, it is true, but sometimes, proves prophetic—an instinct to put one on the defensive. You know, Hugh, that I had always a conviction that he was not at heart your friend. I should have more faith in this emigration plan if I did not know that it came from him. Oh, Hugh, be cautious what you do, and mind how you trust your welfare in his hands."

He answered, gravely remonstrative, "My dear, this sounds like prejudice, and I'm afraid it is taking you too far. Adversity is said to be a test of friendship, and since we came to know Cousin Mark, you can not say that he has been found wanting."

But Margaret's face still showed doubt, and Hugh, pondering on her words, felt strongly disposed to pity Mark Danson as an unconscious victim of evil impressions. Before they said "good-night" to each other, Hugh showed his sister the little silk handkerchief which he had hidden in his breast, saying, significantly, "If there is any inquiry for this when I am gone, you will know what to answer. I shall take it with me as a relic of my mother."

His looks and words carried with them a pang of anguish which seemed to renew her own, for she seized his hands with passionate fervor, crying, "Dear Hugh! I feel that I can not give you up after all. Oh, for our mother's sake, if not for mine, can nothing be done to keep you with us?"

## CHAPTER XLII.

### MAY'S LETTER.

NOTHING could be more peaceful than Aunt Lydia's sitting-room in the middle of a still summer afternoon, about the time that the good spinster usually subsided into quiet after her numerous morning tasks. When she had fed

her birds, tended the plants, dusted her much-valued store of old china, and personally seen to the well-being of every thing animate and inanimate about the house, it was then that she settled down to her wool-work or netting, unless on exceptional occasions when there were any pressing demands on her attention. It was also about the time that the treacherous drowsiness stole over her, gradually relaxing the stiff, straight pose of her back and shoulders, about which she especially prided herself as an example to the present generation of young girls. Then the spectacles would be off duty, and almost imperceptibly slide out of position, while the severe dignity of the upright working attitude lessened off in slow gradations of decline, until at last the threads tangled themselves into the inevitable fiction of "forty winks," and Aunt Lydia, like other less dignified elderly ladies, had succumbed to the weakness of an afternoon doze. This was the state of things on the afternoon in question, when even the song-birds seemed asleep, and there was scarcely a breath to ruffle the rose-leaves, or give a flutter to the filmy lace curtains that hung motionless and cloud-like over the open windows. The venetian blinds were down, with some design of shutting out the sunshine, but it rippled through by stealth, and wandered about the room at its own bright will, weaving a golden mosaic pattern on the carpet, the rich-hued table-cover, and the skirt of Aunt Lydia's violet taffeta dress, with the bright piece of wool-work resting thereon, and the mittened hands of the dear old lady herself folded placidly over the whole. And those intrusive sunbeams even took liberties with the oil painting, over the sideboard, of May's great-grandmother, taken in her youth, and representing a grave-eyed damsel with a towering edifice of hair and a peaked stomacher dress. But Aunt Lydia slept on, in peaceful oblivion of every thing. A sleek tortoise-shell cat had appropriated the footstool at her feet, and lay there coiled like a ball of soft luxurious-looking fur.

Under such favorable conditions, it is doubtful how long the old lady's slumber would have been protracted, if the door had not been suddenly whisked open, and May Rivers had not danced into the room, bringing in with her a shining train of sunbeams from the wide old-fashioned entrance hall. She fluttered gayly round to the sleeper's chair, and unceremoniously dispossessing the cat from its position, sank down on the stool; her gauzy dress of some soft gray hue showing light and cool against the warm tints of color that surrounded Aunt Lydia, and making a strong point of contrast in the subdued light of the room. The result of this intrusion was a violent start from the old lady and a confused murmur. Then thoroughly awake with a guilty, detected air of self-consciousness, Aunt Lydia was sitting upright in the chair, gathering up her work and straightening her back with an assertion of wakefulness that seemed whimsical-comical to May Rivers.

"My dear, how you startled me; I suppose,

because I was not expecting you to drop in just now. I don't know how it is, child, you seem perpetually on the move, yet manage to keep yourself looking so nice and cool. As for myself, now, if it were not that I have plenty of work, this warm afternoon would almost send me to sleep."

There was a demure gleam of mischief in May's brown eyes as she stole a meaning glance at the work over which Aunt Lydia's fingers did not seem to have quite resumed their habitual active control; but May said nothing to indicate that she was enlightened on the subject of the afternoon doze, which had become a sort of established fiction. It was often a fund of secret mirth to her, but she kept it to herself, and let the dear old lady retain her delusion.

"Where is your brother, my dear?" questioned Aunt Lydia, looking affably down on her favorite, for she was fast recovering her equanimity.

"In his studio, stoically indifferent to the state of the thermometer, and grinding away at his canvas as though afraid that the day will be too short for all the work that he wants to put into it. His energy and industry seemed to rebuke my idleness, so I left him to his painter's paradise, and took flight, fearing I might be in his way and perhaps do some damage among his paints and brushes."

So prattled May in the exuberance of her youthful vivacity, and to the infinite gratification of Aunt Lydia, who delighted in listening to the sweet chirping bird-like voice.

"My dear, I have been thinking how strange it is that I should get to like that young man so much, considering the extraordinary circumstances, and his being an entire stranger. You remember, May, I thought I should never get reconciled to him, for all the trouble he had caused; in the first instance by getting lost, and then coming to light when no one expected him, and depriving you of your fortune; but I must say that he has behaved very properly, May."

"Properly, aunt! How could you expect otherwise from him, being a Rivers, and my dear father's son? though after all, I have, perhaps, more faith in the nobility that belongs to ourselves than that which comes to us by inheritance. But Charley is a good generous creature, and after mature deliberation I pronounce myself quite satisfied with my brother. Then with regard to the loss of my fortune," she continued, the demure gleam again appearing in her eyes, "there is another benefit connected with it which you have, perhaps, not taken into account—viz., the trouble that I may have escaped; for who can tell what snares and pitfalls of danger I might have been betrayed into by my unfortunate heiress-ship, to say nothing of fortune-hunters, and being run away with for the sake of my money, and married against my will to some modern Bluebeard, who might make my life miserable ever after, if he did not try to kill me with kindness!"

There was a piteous expression on the old lady's face, but she found it impossible to arrest the flow of May's words until the stream ebbed itself out.

"My dear, you use such strong language! Why do you talk in that dreadful strain? It has made me quite uncomfortable."

"Well, auntie, I was only drawing a picture of possibilities; such things have been, you know, and might be again."

"But you need not talk about them, my dear; you are quite safe from any thing of that kind," said the old lady, anxiously.

May laughed. "Yes, aunt, I am safe at least from the dire calamity of being married against my will; and, by-the-by, I have something to tell you that will just prove the truth of that, and come in as an illustration. I am quite sure it will surprise you; but that is not all, for I must tell you, aunt, I am the bearer of some strange intelligence this afternoon, which is the reason why I intruded my society upon you before tea-time."

"My dear child, you are so light and excitable that there is no telling whether you mean any thing serious or not; very likely it will turn out to be nothing but fun and nonsense."

But though Aunt Lydia said this, she paused in her work, and pushed up her spectacles—two significant signs that her curiosity was excited. May replied quietly, "I shall leave you to judge for yourself on those points, dear aunt. To begin, then, my first item of intelligence has reference to a favorite of yours, Mr. Mark Danson."

"Favorite of mine!" repeated the spinster, hastily repudiating the term. "That can not be correct, May, for I am not aware that I ever expressed the least partiality for the young man; indeed I'm not sure that you have not heard me say I should quite dislike him if it was not that he is your guardian's nephew, and I happen to remember his mother, who was a most amiable young person when I knew her."

"It is to be regretted that her son does not resemble her," said May, "for I think Mr. Danson any thing but amiable, and I have taken some pains to impress that opinion upon him, for I have often been positively uncivil, so it is not any fault of mine that he subjected himself to disappointment and mortification to his pride, for I don't believe that his feelings, if he has any, are deeply concerned in the matter."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"That Mr. Danson has offered himself to me as a suitor, and as much as asked me to be his wife."

Aunt Lydia was dumb with astonishment and dismay at this last crowning piece of presumption, which, in her eyes, filled the measure of Mark Danson's offenses. She drew a long breath, and sat for some moments gazing fixedly at her niece. When she did recover her voice, she repeated slowly, "Asked you to be his wife!"

"Yes," returned May, gravely. "I was both sorry and provoked; for he ought to have un-

derstood my feelings better than to allow himself to commit such an error. He dropped some hint about his uncle's wishes on the subject—indeed, I could gather from what he said, that he proposed only as a matter of form to please his uncle. If my guardian has entertained such desires, he was too wise to confide them to me; but I think he was too keen-sighted not to discover that I was in no danger of losing my heart to his nephew, and that is the truth, as you know, Aunt Lydia. If there was not another eligible bachelor in the world, I would not marry Mark Danson if he could give me a title and coronet. I am not sure that I did not tell him something of the kind. Indeed, I am afraid that I treated him badly, but the fault was his. I might have been sorry for him, if he had not taken his own merits so much for granted, and used that supercilious tone which always set me in arms against him. But the termination was the worst of all," continued May, with her face in an angry glow, "for he dared to become sarcastic, to the effect that he should console himself with the idea that it would prove a most fortunate escape for him, being rejected by a young lady of my temper. Then he dared to utter insulting insinuations about another preference; and, though he did not mention names, I knew very well to whom his allusion pointed." Here the hot glow in the crimson cheeks visibly deepened under the anxiously observant eyes of Aunt Lydia. "If I had been a man," added the girl, with emphasis, "I should just like to have taken a whip and given him a sound thrashing."

"My dear," faintly remonstrated Aunt Lydia, "those ideas are so unfeminine. Only think how shocked Miss Beckfield would be to hear you."

This remark turned the current of May's thoughts and made her laugh. "I can just fancy Miss Beckfield's horror, though she would profess not to be surprised at any outrageous breach of discipline from me. Poor governess, I am afraid that I vexed her soul in those days; yet, after all, I know she liked me," the speaker added, saucily.

"My dear, when did that—that circumstance occur?" faltered the spinster, who had not yet recovered her serenity.

"What, the honor of Mr. Danson's offer? It was the other day when we dined at Broombank. Perhaps you may remember that the gentleman very officiously volunteered to show me some rare exotics which had come out in one of the greenhouses. He gave himself some unnecessary trouble on my account, as I would far rather have had Simmons, the gardener, to point them out, for I could divine that Mr. Danson knew and cared no more about the plants than if they had been a collection of the commonest weeds that grew. However, there is an end of any more overtures of that kind from him, for I believe I have effectually quenched the feeble spark of his regard for me. It is to be hoped that his next choice will be better and wiser for himself."

"Married!" exclaimed Aunt Lydia, still nursing her smouldering wrath, for this much dreaded contingency had not yet been dwelt upon in association with her darling—"to think of him asking you to be married, May, such a child as you are; there will be time enough for such thoughts in five or six years to come."

"Yes, of course, aunt," May replied, with a sly curve of her cherry mouth; "quite time enough when I am thirty."

But the old lady was not satisfied. "What did Mr. Danson mean by another preference, my dear? I think you said just now that you knew to whom his allusion pointed. I did not understand that very clearly."

Perhaps it was not intended that she should, for at that moment her niece seemed afflicted with unaccountable deafness. She sprang from her seat and made a sudden raid on the peace of the cat, which had found another resting-place on the hearth-rug, then answered Aunt Lydia with the somewhat irrelevant remark, "Why, aunt, your Tibby is positively growing out of all resemblance to any thing but a great plump pin-cushion."

"My dear, how you do run from one thing to another. You had better not nurse Tibby, for she will be sure to tear your dress with her claws; but I was just asking you—"

She was again on the verge of that formidable inquiry; but it was destined to go no farther, for a second time May successfully contrived to evade it. She had taken from her pocket a letter which she now held out for the old lady's inspection, saying, "I have not yet exhausted my intelligence, aunt; the most surprising, and perhaps most serious, portion I have reserved for the last. See here, I received this at noon. A letter from whom I can not tell, only it is signed 'Eleanor,' and contains an urgent request for me to call to-morrow morning at the address which is given in the letter. I think the house is somewhere in Islington."

This was sufficient to throw Aunt Lydia into a flutter of nervous agitation—for she had an exaggerated dread of the dangers to which unprotected females were exposed in the great world of London. She took the letter tremblingly, read its contents, then held it doubtfully in her hand and looked at it—subjecting even the paper and envelope to suspicious scrutiny.

As our readers will have guessed, May's mysterious letter came from the daughter of Giles Royton, earnestly soliciting a visit from the young lady, with what motive will hereafter be seen. It contained only a few simple words, written in a tone which seemed to carry with it an impression of genuine feeling and sincerity on the part of the writer, sufficient in itself to disarm any form of suspicion less exacting and unquestioning than that of timid, scrupulous Aunt Lydia.

"I know," said the writer, "that this request which I make will sound like a daring breach of the conventional restrictions and safeguards which very properly fence round society. All



I can say is, to beg Miss Rivers to trust me and grant me the favor I ask, for it concerns her interest as well as mine. As a credential of my honesty, I might give the name of one who is no doubt known to her—Margaret Crawton—were it not that this must be a matter of strict confidence between the writer and Miss Rivers.

ton—that name seems in some way familiar to me.”

“Ask Charles,” suggested Aunt Lydia.

“No,” decided May, quickly; “this stranger, whoever she may be, has evidently strict ideas of confidence, and I can not think of committing a breach.”



“Certainly, I must go, aunt.”

Will it suffice to say that the above-named has been my friend for years? Again I ask to be trusted.”

“It is very singular,” commented May, as she finished reading aloud this portion of the letter, adding in a musing tone, “Royton, Roy-

“But surely you will not dream of going, child?” said Aunt Lydia, nervously.

May opened her large eyes in prettily-affected surprise at this remark. “Certainly, I must go, aunt; I could not refuse.”

“Well, my dear, I consider it dreadfully im-

prudent. You can not tell what snare you may be falling into."

May laughed. "Why, aunt, you might be afraid of assassination or a political conspiracy; but seriously, dear auntie, you may rest satisfied that I shall come to no harm, and that there is not the slightest cause for fear."

But the old lady shook her head, only half convinced. "Why can not this person come to see you, May? that would be far more reasonable."

"Perhaps she is ill."

"Ah, yes; and it may be some infectious fever," said Aunt Lydia, taking a new alarm, which was far more difficult for May to soothe. But she succeeded at last, after agreeing to certain stipulations, among the rest that she should take with her, for protection, Barker the coachman.

"Of course you will go in the carriage, May?"

"No, aunt; it will be like going in state, and trying to make my visit a grand piece of condescension—for I have an idea that the writer of this letter is a lady of reduced means and sensitive like the rest of her class. I have been consulting my map, and I find that I can take a train to King's Cross, then Barker can get me a cab for the rest of the journey."

So it was agreed, but very reluctantly on the part of Aunt Lydia, who had still all kinds of gloomy misgivings on the subject. She spent the rest of the day in mourning over May's willfulness, and lamenting that she would not allow it to be mentioned to Charles, who might have been able to render both assistance and advice with regard to her unknown correspondent.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### A WASTED LIFE.

How intolerable seemed the heat of the summer weather in that narrow street, populous with unwashed children and shrill-voiced women—with lines of tall, dilapidated-looking houses, most of them swarming with lodgers; houses where broken window-panes repaired with impromptu substitutes of brown paper, were nothing rare; and where soiled rags of curtains might be seen flaunting in the stifling air like distress-signals of poverty. How completely the summer evenings were robbed of their sweetness in this squalid place, with its wretched surroundings and close, stifling atmosphere,—soft cool evenings that are such a boon after the day's heat, and seem so delicious in country lanes, among green meadow-paths, or shell-strewn walks by the singing sea!

But, for the present, we have to do with the overcrowded London street, and our visit is to a first-floor back room in one of the cleanest-looking of the houses—a poor place, not much larger than a cell, with a window that stared blindly out on a dead blank of brick wall. It was furnished with a sprinkling of superannuated

cane chairs, a tiny square of attenuated carpet in the middle of the floor, and a rickety horse-hair sofa that looked as if it held within itself the shabby secret of a press-bed. But even here there was a touch of taste and an effort at the ornamental, which would not perhaps have been found among its neighbors. This element was represented by a framed sampler of the Lord's Prayer over the fire-place, and two china dogs on the mantel, with a geranium on the window-sill which had struggled into bloom, and put forth some tiny blossoms, like a beautiful Christian soul rising above the crushing pressure of misfortune, and letting its light shine in dark and desert places.

Poor as this lodging was, it must be admitted that it was an immeasurable improvement upon the miserable attic in which we have seen the unhappy father of Mark Danson, for it was he who sat half-reclining on the sofa, with his sunken eyes turned wearily to the window, and his dull gray face showing almost ghastly in the dim evening light. He had been ill; that explained the recumbent position, the visible weakness and reduced bulk of the body, and the signs of emaciation in the passive, helpless hands. A violent cold from reckless exposure on the night that he parted with his son, added to mental excitement, wild drinking, and insufficient food, had combined to bring on an illness, which had struck at the very root of life. Closely he had skirted the border of the "dark valley." But he was now slowly recovering, thanks to the charity of his landlady, who was one of the good Samaritans to be often found among the toiling, burdened women of the poor. The man is changed from what we knew him. We have had no experience of him in this new phase of his sadly wasted life. We find here something that has little kinship with the miserable creature in the attic, with his speculative cunning and hungry greed for money, gloating over the secret upon which he was preparing to trade. Different also to Lawyer Markham's client, the astute, keen-eyed calculator of chances, and the cool, plotting, plausible visitor to the artist's studio. Quite as much unlike to these as he was to the excited gambler with the scathing fever of play upon him, staking his all; or the fierce dark passion of the man with curling, scornful lips and angry eyes, who had laid bare the gall of his stung spirit that night on the river bridge, when the father was disowned by his son.

In the saddened, softened spirit of these later days, he was accustomed to say that his illness had perhaps saved him from an end that might have been worse than all, "for after that night I got reckless, as if I didn't care what became of me." But the issue had been mercifully taken out of his own hands, and he had been brought face to face with truths which he had not recognized before. There he lay, the wreck of a wasted life, on which the winter of old age was stealing fast. Forsaken—poor—reaping the harvest which he had sown in the errors of

that past, which had banned him out from the knowledge and regard of his kindred; the gentleman of education and social standing dependent at last on the charity of a poor laborer's wife.

"Yes, I have only myself to blame for all," he murmured, taking a sip of some thin gruel which the kind woman of the house had brought him. "I made my start in life with as fair prospects as any of them, much better than proud Daniel Crawton, but he made, while I married, a fortune—that was the difference between us. I deserve to be cast out as I am now, beaten—beaten under foot. Poor Margaret, she has had her revenge, as I said; but she would not have exulted in it; she was too tender and loving—not like her brothers. God forgive me for all I made her suffer."

He had been fumbling in one of his pockets while he talked, and at length brought out the same old pocket-book in which he had kept the papers which had proved so important to Charles Rivers. From this he took a little roll of paper tied with silk, which he unfolded, disclosing a silky curl of soft dark hair. He gazed at it wistfully for some seconds, the crowd of accusing memories coming thick upon him. "I had the heart even to sell the locket that held her hair—to barter it away because it was gold and would fetch its price. So I would have sold the dearest thing I had in those days. Oh, Margaret! to think that the bitterest sting of all should have been given by him—your son and mine—the little pale-faced boy that you were so fond of. To be disowned—flung off as something far beneath him—a kind of refuse only fit for the kennel. Even Daniel would not have sanctioned that, for, as I said, he was always just. How it will wring his heart to find what it is that he has fostered—that the son from whom he expects so much, is only an ugly likeness of the father—with all the taint of his old wickedness showing through the sham of fair-seeming."

Here he stopped, as though exhausted, and lay for some minutes silently regarding the lock of hair; once or twice passing his hand over his eyes, as if something obscured the clearness of his vision. His trembling fingers worked nervously as he replaced his relic in the paper, and put it back in the pocket-book, beginning again his murmuring talk, which sounded like a monotonous wail, now and then taking a sharper cadence as his feelings grew excited.

"I remember I had got to feel so lonely in this great London, and a sort of longing came upon me that night; such a longing as all men must have at times, if they are not brutes and savages. That was why I dropped my disguise, and made myself known after all those years of silence. If he had only met me with a little kindness, some sort of recognition of the tie between us, I should have been content. But it was only another form of my own evil nature rising in arms against me. I will keep my word as soon as I have strength to crawl out again

into the daylight. Daniel Crawton shall know all. I wonder how he will meet me. Those Crawtons were always against me, every one—but Margaret. Still I should like to see Robert, and above all his wife. I remember her; she was very religious, but she had always a tender way with her and a kind voice. Yes, I should like to see Robert's wife again before I die. And, if I am not mistaken, they have a daughter named after her aunt, Margaret; so, if she is alive now, there will be a second Margaret Crawton."

At this point in the musings which the sick man had been murmuring aloud, the door opened, and the mistress of the house entered—a little slight woman with a tired aspect and a care-lined face. If she had been a lady, her hands would have looked small and delicate; but she was one of the poor, on whom the burden of life pressed heavily, so her hands were seamed and rough. Hard-working hands—but they did what they could in the way of service for others; and a tender human heart had educated them in the mystery of gentlest womanly touches for those who suffered, as the invalid on the sofa knew. He turned at the sound of the opening door, and his wan face brightened when he saw her. She came to look after her patient, "and do a bit of tidying about the room," as she expressed it.

"Do you feel yourself better to-night?" she asked, cheerfully.

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Dale."

"Have you supped the gruel?"

"Yes," with a grateful look.

"Poorish stuff for strength: wish it had been something better," she commented to herself. Aloud she said, "Can I get you any thing else, sir?"

"Yes," spoken with some hesitation; "I should be glad if you would bring me a little paper and some ink; I want to try to write a letter to a friend."

"Ah, yes, that you told me about this afternoon; it had quite slipped my mind," she replied with a look of concern, moving towards the door. A gesture from the sick man stopped her.

"Not just this minute, Mrs. Dale; I can wait a bit longer. I only want to get it ready for the last post if I can. But stay, now, there is something I want to ask you. How is it that you are so different to the rest of people in your class? I mean, what made you willing to let me stop here, taking up your room when my money was gone and I had nothing to pay? Why didn't you turn me out when I got ill?"

She answered, simply, "I couldn't turn a dog out, if it was helpless and had nowhere else to go, let alone a fellow-creature."

"But what made you do it?" queried the man again.

"I don't know; only we're told to do as we'd be done by. I'd a father of my own once, and if he'd been like you, with none belonging to him, I'd have liked somebody to take him in."



Something like a groan came from the sofa, and the sick man shaded his eyes. He was thinking again of that miserable scene on the bridge. He said, faintly, "Was there any other reason for your great kindness to me?"

She looked at him wonderingly, as if not

"I should like to see for myself; will you lend it to me?"

"Yes, sir."

This simple, unlettered student knew very little of theology, sects, or creeds. She had just taken the Word according to the light that was



"The Bible; does it teach you all this?"

quite understanding the drift of his questions; but she replied, frankly, "I was a regular attendant at Sunday-school, and I get it from my Bible that we should do all the good we can to one another."

"The Bible; does it teach you all this?"

"Yes, and a great deal more."

given her; but she had sat in spirit at the feet of the Great Teacher, and learned of Him.

The sick man spoke again after a pause. "Your husband is not like you. I know he abuses you for getting so little out of your lodgers; but you bear it."

A flush drifted into her face; but, woman-

like, she tried to throw a shield over the coarse, besotted husband, who ruled her as a tyrant.

"That's all the fault of the drink, sir; Tom's not 'ard-hearted when he's sober."

Oh, loving, patient heart of woman! so often bruised and trodden under foot, even by those who should comfort and sustain. Here was something of Mrs. Crawton's nature; the same lowly, practical religion, and the meek endurance which carried her through her trials. Far removed as they were—the lady by refinement and education, and the toiling woman on the lower level—they were united by the bond of a sisterhood which no difference of social caste could destroy; and as sisters and kindred spirits they shall be known in "that day when He maketh up his jewels."

A few moments more, and the sick man was again alone. Mrs. Dale had brought him what he wanted, with the addition of a little oil-lamp which she lighted for him. Then he sat up, and prepared to begin his letter.

"Yes, it must be done; I can't let this good woman be a loser by me, so there's nothing for it but to ask Mr. Charles. The old lawyer is not to be thought of; I think he owes me a grudge for not being more open with him in that affair. Well, I don't think the nephew will deny me."

He had scarcely written a line on the paper when his pen was arrested by hearing footsteps in the passage, and the sound of a voice, which he thought he knew, presently followed by that of Mrs. Dale, as if answering an inquiry.

"Yes, sir, this way."

Another second, and the door was thrown open, and the strange voice—about which he had not been mistaken—cried, "Why, old fellow—sorry you've been ill. I have had precious hard work to hunt you up, but I didn't expect to find you like this."

A confused, shrinking look passed over the sick man's face, even while he suffered his hand to be grasped in Fred Dalton's hearty shake. Was it that he felt there was some incongruity between his visitor and a certain bulky volume, which his landlady had not forgotten to leave for him? or was it that there were none but unpleasant associations with Fred Dalton, and that he was linked with a passage in his life which he had resolved to try to forget?

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### CHRISS ON GUARD.

A LOW double knock at the street door had brought up Chriss from the kitchen, in no amiable mood. To use her own expression, every thing had gone cross with her that day. She opened the door, not highly impressed with the importance of the visitor whoever he might be. She drew her conclusions from the knock, which she had not recognized. Chriss was

learned in all the varied sounds of the door-knocker.

"Is Mr. Hugh Crawton at home?" asked a man's voice, which was not familiar to the old servant.

"No, he ain't," she answered, snappishly, filling the doorway with her tall figure, as though she intended to make it a barrier against some meditated advance on the part of the stranger.

"Will you please to tell me what time he is expected? My business is urgent, and I must see him to-night if possible."

"I don't know as I can tell you any thing," returned Chriss, deliberately surveying the speaker. She was mentally resolved that her young master should not be betrayed into any trap by her own want of caution. He looked with dismay at the grim guardian of the portal. Her look and manner were unquestionably hostile.

"I suppose you are Chriss. Can I speak to Mrs. or Miss Crawton?"

"No, you can't, they're both engaged," adding, to herself, "you'll not get any thing for your trouble if you're come here as a spy."

The man deliberated for a few seconds, muttering, "This is awkward; I shouldn't like to miss seeing him to-night, so there's nothing for it but to wait till he turns up."

"Perhaps you'll be civil enough to take in my name—Mr. Giles Royton. Miss Crawton would know—"

Here Chriss cut him short, repeating, "Mr. Giles Royton. I know that name; you're one of them from the office, which it would have been a good thing if Mr. Hugh had never seen nor heard tell of. And for any thing I know, you've been sent by them as made out that liability against him; but if that's it, neither you nor your name gets any further than this door, if I can hinder it."

Giles Royton felt himself in a dilemma. The implacable hostility of the old servant was a difficulty which he had not calculated upon. It is doubtful whether he would ever have succeeded in allaying her suspicions, or convincing her that she was under a mistake as to the motive of his visit, but at that moment, greatly to his relief, he heard behind him a quick step, which he knew at once to be that of Hugh Crawton. The young man met him with a manner of friendly recognition; but was evidently surprised at the encounter. Chriss looked on in visible apprehension, lest her young master should unwittingly betray himself into the hands of his enemies—for such she now considered every one who came from the office. Even Mr. Mark Danson came in for his share of disfavor. She rivalled Hugh's dog Jip in her aversion to that young gentleman.

"Good evening, Mr. Hugh, I was waiting to see you. I came for a special purpose, and didn't like going back without doing my errand. "But," he added, in a low tone, aside to Hugh, "if you hadn't made your appearance, I should have had to resign myself to a cold parade in front of your house, for the old servant had made

up her mind to keep me outside. She kept guard at that door like a mastiff. I think she has her doubts about me."

Hugh smiled, and nodded to the old woman. "It's all right, Chriss, Mr. Royton is my friend. Now let us come in and sit down. Is father gone to bed?"

"Yes; and your mother's just gone up to read till he falls asleep. It's been one of his bad days; and he won't let her out of his sight, if he can help it."

Hugh stifled a sigh at the thought of his mother, and the daily trials that were wearing out her gentle life; then turned to his visitor, with the inquiry, "How is your daughter to-night, Royton?"

"Much about the same as when your sister saw her. She'll be looking out for me, so I must hurry back as soon as I can."

Hugh took the hint, and they lost no time in following Chriss to the little sitting-room which the invalid had not long since left. She raked together the dying embers of the fire, and turned up the light of the lamp on the table, then left them, casting a suspicious glance at Giles Royton, for in spite of Hugh's assurance, she did not feel easy in her mind about him, and could not divest herself of the fear that this visit boded some ill to her young master.

"You must not mind our old Chriss," said Hugh, apologetically, as the servant closed the door; "she's rather cross and eccentric, but quite a rough diamond in her own way; and you know she is privileged in our house."

"Yes, of course," returned Giles Royton, absently, taking the chair which Hugh offered him. He was trying to study the face of the ex-cashier, noting how changed it was since he had last seen it. He was troubled to see the unwonted lines, with the anxious, burdened look, and that cloud in the frank eyes. Hugh was flushed now with excitement at the unexpected meeting with him, recalling as it did so many painful associations. "You will be wondering what has brought me here to-night, Mr. Hugh," he began, a little tremulously. "I ought to have come before, but had not the courage, though it was my duty, as Nelly said."

"I don't understand you, Royton," replied Hugh, giving him a perplexed look.

Giles pulled nervously at the corners of his pocket-handkerchief. "I dare say not, but you will presently, Mr. Hugh. Now before I say any thing else, let me tell you that I have known all that was charged against you, and believed you innocent from the first."

they seem to let in new light upon me, and do me more good than I can tell."

But Giles Royton shrank back with a look of distress, saying hurriedly, "Don't thank me in that way, Mr. Hugh; it puts me down, and makes me feel so much worse in my own eyes. I believed, because I knew, you were innocent; and instead of thanks from you, I deserve nothing but blame and reproach for not coming forward at the right time and bearing witness to the truth. Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive! what are you talking about, my good fellow? I don't know that you ever did me any wrong," said wondering Hugh.

"Yes I have, a cruel wrong; and even now I might not have had courage to undo it of myself. I meant to do right by you, but I was always weak—weak of will and purpose. This is all Nelly's doing, you owe her the thanks. She always kept alive what ever good was in me."

"I can't make you out, Royton; you seem to be talking riddles. What is this wrong which you have done me?"

"The wrong of holding my tongue, when a few words would have saved you from being driven from your uncle's counting-house. Ay, now you shrink from me, as well you may, Hugh Crawton; but don't think harder of me than you can help. I know you have been falsely suspected, and if God spares me, before this time to-morrow Daniel Crawton shall know it as well. I shall be able to prove my words."

A hot rush of crimson had succeeded the deadly paleness which overspread Hugh's face, as he started from his seat.

"What are you saying, Royton? Oh, no—no! you would not surely trifle with me in this."

"No more than I would trifle with my own life."

"Thank God for this mercy!" breathed Hugh.

"Now I can work my way, and try what stuff I am made of in the New World; no longer under any man's foot, I can leave England with a free heart."

"Leave England!" repeated Royton, starting in his turn; "I was in hopes we should be having you back among us."

"I am promised a good opening in Australia," explained Hugh; "but I did not like the thought of going out like a convict with a ban upon my name. I have a friend who has been working very zealously in my interest, and I have left myself almost entirely in his hands."

"May I ask who that friend may be?" said the clerk with strange eagerness, a quick flash of intelligence lighting his dull eyes.

"My cousin, Mr. Mark Danson."

"Mr. Mark Danson," slowly repeated Giles, drawing a long breath as he added, "I thought it was him."

Hugh's attention was so pre-occupied that he had not noticed any thing peculiar in his visitor's manner. He resumed: "When my cousin offered me his friendship, on my first going

## CHAPTER XLV.

### A REVELATION.

A sudden impulse made Hugh Crawton lean across a table and grasp the hand of the old clerk, which he wrung fervently. "You believe it, Royton! Oh, thanks, thanks for those words!

into the firm, I little thought that the time would come when I should stand in sore need of a friend; but he has been to me like a brother."

"Yes, very like a brother," interjected Giles, under his breath.

Hugh continued, pouring out his confidence without restraint in the exuberance of his grateful feeling towards Cousin Mark, "I am indebted to him for the idea of bettering my condition by emigrating. He has offered to assist me to go out to Melbourne, and has written to some influential friends to procure me a situation there."

"And you have decided to go, Mr. Hugh?" the clerk asked, dryly, giving his mouth an expressive twist that the young man did not see.

"Partly; I am to see my cousin to-morrow, to talk it all over. But, Royton, you have not yet given me your explanation; tell me at once, and relieve me from this fever of suspense."

It took only a few minutes to put Hugh Cawton in possession of the disclosure which Giles Royton had made at the bedside of his sick daughter. The young man listened with blanched cheek and startled, dilating eyes, his hand now and then grasping the edge of the table, and his lips quivering with excitement, as the words of the speaker gave him the clue to the mystery, and unfolded, one by one, the facts of the deep-laid plot which cruel treachery had aimed against his prospects and good name.

"Who can have done me this injury? You do not tell me the name of my enemy. Stay—you said just now that you had done me a wrong. Oh, Royton, is it possible that you have had a hand in this?"

The old clerk was deeply agitated; that involuntary suspicion hurt him more than Hugh could have guessed; for the man had much undeveloped goodness in him, easily accessible to any appeal; and with all its infirmities and its moral cowardice, his nature had some fine chords keenly sensitive to such words as Hugh had spoken.

"What have I ever done that you should lay that upon me? Look in my face, and read your answer. I have done you no wrong, except in holding my tongue when I should have spoken."

"Forgive me, Royton; I might have known you had not;" and Hugh extended his hand, which was warmly grasped. "Now tell me the name," he said, huskily.

But, for some unaccountable reason, Giles Royton seemed to evade the question.

"Can you think of any one in the counting-house who had an interest in seeing you ruined, Mr. Hugh?"

"Not one," was the answer.

Just then a clock somewhere in the house was heard striking the hour. Giles counted the strokes, and compared the time with his own watch, saying, as he rose from his seat, "I must hurry away now, Mr. Hugh. It may seem queer, but I don't want to tell you the name till to-morrow. I have a purpose which I can not work out unless I keep it a secret. But you may trust me that it will be for your good. You

say you are going to see Mr. Mark to-morrow; let me know the place and the hour, and I will step in upon you, as if by accident, and tell you all. But understand, you are to say nothing to your cousin that you have seen or heard any thing from me. Better let the good news come unexpectedly. You may put this down as an odd fancy of my own; but don't doubt me, Mr. Hugh. All I ask is, wait till to-morrow, the suspense will not be very long."

There was a peculiar expression on Giles Royton's face that greatly perplexed Hugh. Before he could answer, the door opened softly and his mother came in.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### ELEANOR AND HER VISITOR.

ELEANOR sat at her parlor window, waiting and watching for the coming of May Rivers. She had received no answer to the letter which had cost her such a struggle to write, and which she had sent on its errand with such trembling fear and hope. No answer; but she accepted the young lady's silence as a sign that the favor she had asked would be granted. So she prepared for the interview, which she knew would be a trial, and tried to brace her nerves for the task which she had voluntarily imposed upon herself. Taking some light needlework in her hand, to keep her from impatience, she drew a chair near the window, and sat so that she might command the first approach of a stranger. Eleanor was gradually recovering her strength in the bright summer days, but the languor of weakness was still upon her, and her illness had left her painfully fragile in appearance. Her needle went slowly through her fingers, as if it kept time to the beating of a heavy heart, often suspended altogether when she caught the sound of wheels in the street, and paused to listen and watch. Then when the cab or carriage passed without stopping, she would drop her hold of the curtain with a little impatient gesture, and resume her work.

Soft showers had fallen in the early hours of the morning, and light feathery clouds were still floating in the sky; but the sun was shining out, with the promise of a bright day, and the only effect of the rain had been to leave a dewy moisture on the ground and a refreshing coolness in the air. There was nothing in the weather to deter even a dainty young lady from venturing on a short journey. So thought Eleanor, as the question, "Would she come?" presented itself again and again to her mind. She had an eager longing to see May Rivers, of whom she had heard from the time that the young girl had left school. Her father had often related to her bits of gossip which somehow found their way to the counting-house. Glowing hints about the beauty and accomplishments of Daniel Cawton's ward, with whispers which did not scruple to link the name of the young heiress with that

of Mr. Danson, in anticipation of a future matrimonial alliance between them. Eleanor silently listened to all this; but as time passed, bringing estrangement between her and Mark, and the long-delayed acknowledgment of their marriage was making her heart sick with suspense and hope deferred, she recalled what she had heard, and the rumors, which she had before quietly put aside as idle talk, began to receive some coloring of truth. Mark had been won by the charm of a new face. She accused him, but he threw it off lightly and laughingly, with some mocking jest about her jealousy. But she was not convinced. The doubt fastened upon her mind, and received its worst confirmation in the mode of treatment which he adopted towards her. It was during her illness, when the last appeal to her unworthy husband had failed, and her father had confided to her the secret of Mark Danson's conspiracy against Hugh Crawton. Then she decided that the time had come for her to give her warning to May Rivers, who had now a new claim upon her interest, as the half-sister of the man whom her friend Margaret loved and, perhaps, would marry. From this source, too, she had been able to gather additional information about the young lady; for, in discussing the singular events which had brought such change in her lover's prospects, Margaret often mentioned the charming young sister to whom she had been introduced. And Eleanor, familiar with every phase and turn of thought in the mind of her friend, saw that she was beginning to like May Rivers for her own sake.

It was during one of these confidential talks that Margaret unconsciously winged an arrow to Eleanor's heart.

"There is my cousin, Mr. Mark Danson, for whom I have told you that I have a sort of antipathy, Nelly. Well, I half suspect that he has a preference for Miss May, from his conscious manner once or twice when she chanced to be named; but I do not know whether it is likely to be returned. My cousin does not seem overpleased with the discovery of her relationship to Charles. It may be he is afraid it will give him some influence over her which will be exerted against his interest, for you know, dear, Mark and Charles never get on well together, they were antagonists from the time of their first meeting."

"The time has come when my silence would be even a greater wrong than was that of my poor father with regard to Hugh Crawton. She may be getting to love Mark, and, come what will, she must be warned and saved."

This was what the young wife said to herself, after that talk with Margaret, when she made up her mind to send the letter to May Rivers.

Absorbed in her own sad thoughts, Eleanor forgot her watch of the window; thus she did not notice the approach of a cab, with an elderly man, who looked like a servant out of livery, on the box beside the driver. He seemed on the look-out for some particular number, for the cab came somewhat slowly up the street, and he

kept the houses on each side under close observation, until at last he exclaimed, in a sort of cheerful soliloquy, "Here we are; Prospect Terrace, No. 10. This must be the place."

Eleanor heard the stopping of the cab, and knew that her expected visitor had arrived. She started, dropped her work, and stood up, trembling with agitation. Then she managed to ring the bell, as a signal for Ann to be ready to answer the door, catching a hurried glance at her own face in the mantel-glass as she passed back to her chair, into which she dropped, her heart beating fast, and the color flushing and paling on her cheek. At last she was to see her—this May Rivers, who had unconsciously been her rival, and of whom she had drawn so many ideal pictures. She had never analyzed her own feelings on the subject; yet it must be confessed that, blended with her anxiety to see May, there was a secret longing of womanly curiosity to examine for herself the beauty of which she had often heard such praises. If Eleanor had been watching at the window, she would have seen the elderly servant-man in the act of getting down from the box to open the cab-door, and hand out a slight, girlish figure, that tripped lightly across the pavement. As she passed into the gate she paused an instant to say, "You need not wait here all the time, Barker; let the man drive slowly round the neighborhood until you think I shall be ready to go."

Thus she dismissed the servant who had come to be her protector in this unknown region—a proceeding which would have increased the dismay of poor Aunt Lydia, who was at that moment torturing herself with drawing sensational mental pictures of the probable dangers which her darling might be then encountering.

Eleanor, listening for the first sound of the strange voice, thought she had never heard her own name sound so sweet as in that silver-toned inquiry. A few seconds more, and the visitor was in the room. One quick, comprehensive glance sufficed to convey to her a pleased impression of the simple, well-chosen dress, the cool, airy grace of movement, and frank, easy manner which at once gave and excited confidence. Above all, the charm of the face as it first flashed upon her from the folds of a light lace veil, fresh and sweet as a moss-rose within its coyly-shrouding leaves.

Eleanor's heart throbbed wildly, but there was no touch of envious depreciation in the admiring comment which she made to herself, "Margaret scarcely did her justice; she is even more lovely than I anticipated."

It was strange how rapidly the ice of ceremony was broken down between these two, who thus met for the first time under such singular circumstances. They seemed drawn together by some subtle freemasonry of feeling. Eleanor wondered how it came to pass that she found herself so soon at ease with the stranger, and ready to open her heart to her unreservedly, as though she had been an old friend like Margaret Crawton.



"Thanks for coming so promptly, Miss Rivers; it is a proof that you believed and trusted me."

May inclined her head and smiled.

Eleanor added, "Something told me that I should see you to-day, still I could not help doubting: it was so unusual a request to come from a stranger that you would have been justified in refusing."

"I did think it singular," confessed May, frankly; "but after I read your letter, I made up my mind without hesitation."

The expression in Eleanor's eyes thanked her again: but in spite of this mutual candor and the feeling of confidence which seemed established between them, Eleanor felt it hard to approach the real object of this visit, and break at once through the reserve which had been forced upon her, until it had become a habit doubly hard, to have to tell the story of her life to a stranger; to lift the veil from her sad heart, and lay bare its hidden wound of outraged love to those young eyes, however kindly their gaze might be.

Something made her shrink even from uttering the name of Mark Danson in the presence of May Rivers. But she had set herself the task, and it must be done; not alone for her own sake, but for that of the bright young creature whose heart she might be the means of saving from a cruel wound.

"Oh, I hope she has not let him win her heart," moaned Eleanor to herself; "it is so bitter to be deceived where we love, and it might shake her trust in others who would be good and true. But how can I tell it?"

Here her hand involuntarily caught at the almost invisible silken cord which encircled her own fair neck; the cord which held her wedding-ring—time-honored pledge and seal of what should be the most sacred of all earthly bonds—love, faith, honor, and unity till death; but to poor Eleanor such a sad symbol, for she had never been free from a crushing heartache since that tiny circle of gold had been worn in her bosom, a secret which she could not tell.

In the mean time, May, with a grave, expectant look on her sweet face, sat waiting for what was to come, and trying to weave some history of her own about that beautiful, sad-eyed woman whose appearance had taken her by surprise, as something widely different from what she had expected to see.

Just as Eleanor had gathered courage to begin, her bird, inspired, perhaps, by a broad beam of sunshine that fell across his cage, suddenly broke forth with a gushing trill of rich, full-throated melody; and Eleanor had to wait until the little warbler had poured out the last of his ringing notes. When she did speak, her voice was so low and faltering that May had to draw her seat nearer to enable her to hear distinctly.

"You will remember, Miss Rivers, I said in my letter that the favor I asked concerned your interest as well as mine. First I shall have to

speak of a gentleman whom I believe you know—Mr. Mark Danson."

"Mr. Mark Danson!" repeated May, wondering; but Eleanor, who was intently watching her face, read there nothing but surprise. There was none of the startled, half-blushing consciousness which a girl might be expected to betray at the unexpected mention of a name that was very dear to her.

Relieved by this discovery, Eleanor went on, with more firmness: "Before I saw you, Miss Rivers, I asked for trust; now I must beg for your forbearance and forgiveness if I—I say anything to pain you. First tell me—I know I shall seem to be going beyond all bounds, but, oh! believe that I would not ask such a question without a very grave reason—tell me if there is any engagement between you and Mark—I mean Mr. Danson."

May's cheeks burned, and her thin nostril dilated with something of anger as she gave her emphatic, decided negative.

"Then you do not care for him?" gasped poor Eleanor, with painful eagerness.

"Care for him!" retorted May, with strongly-marked surprise. "Mr. Danson is my guardian's nephew; I have known him ever since I was a child, but I never cared for him the least; but now—" She stopped, hesitated, then added, "I was going to say that I do not even respect him."

"One more question, Miss Rivers; you will not be angry with me when you know all. Has he ever made you an offer of marriage?"

"He has," said May, coloring to her temples as she made the confession; "he did so as if he wished to go through the form of doing so, rather than as if he really meant it."

"And you never cared for him. Oh, thank God for that!" Eleanor murmured, crushing her slender hands tightly together.

May stood up and bent over her, with her face full of genuine sympathy and distress as she asked, "What ails you? Can I do any thing?"

"No, I am better," replied Eleanor, faintly; "and now that you have so freely given me your confidence, you have a right to mine. You heard me thank God that you did not care for Mark Danson; it was because I know it will spare you bitter pain, and I did not wish to have a sister in suffering. I sent that letter for you to come here, because I had heard he was paying you attentions, and I feared you might be won to listen to professions which he is not free to make, for I—I am his unhappy wife, never publicly acknowledged by him, but still he is my husband, and you are the first, except my father, to whom I have ever told my secret. Even Margaret Cawton, my dearest friend, does not know of it yet."

As she spoke, Eleanor drew out her wedding-ring, and held it up for May to see.

"His wife!" exclaimed the visitor, with a start. "Mark Danson married!"

The next moment Eleanor felt her hand

gently drawn into that warm young clasp which she felt was full of womanly sympathy. Then it was that she told the story of her life, and gave the history of her secret marriage, the one false step which had brought her so much misery.

The listener made little comment, except what could be conveyed in a fervent pressure of the hand. She felt that words could not heal the wounded heart that was thus laid bare to her.

"You will keep this confidence?" said Eleanor, wistfully. "The time will soon come when all must be known, but at present there are reasons why it is best for the secret to remain as it is. You promise?"

May's lip was trembling, and tears were hanging thickly on her eyelashes. "Yes, Eleanor, I do promise," she whispered, for the first time using her Christian name; and Eleanor looked thankfully into her face, for she knew that she would keep her word.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### FRED DALTON'S ERRAND.

FRED DALTON looked ruefully in his friend's face, and dropped his hand with a puzzled expression, instantly blurring out the thought that crossed his mind.

"I've had precious hard work to hunt you up, as I said, Bland. But, somehow, you don't seem glad to see a fellow after all."

The sick man was ungracious enough to let this remark pass without contradiction, and the result was an embarrassing pause, during which poor Fred, who was really hurt at his reception, employed himself in making a violent, and as it appeared perfectly useless, attempt to button his glove, which was a size too small, and obstinately refused to meet round his wrist. His face flushed as he thought of the errand on which he had come, and at that moment he heartily wished Mark Danson and his affairs at the remotest point of the compass.

In the mean time, the invalid thought of his unfinished letter, and cast a look of unmistakable disappointment at the paper and ink.

Fred was still standing; he did not attempt to take a seat uninvited. The sick man noticed this, also the blank expression of his face, and his own manner relaxed; for it struck him with something of self-reproach, that the young man was guiltless of any offense towards himself—that he had shown proof of friendly intentions, and in calling upon him had meant to do a good-natured thing, which at least deserved some kind of civil recognition. So he forced a smile, and pointed to one of the cane chairs, saying—

"Why don't you sit down, without waiting to be invited, Dalton? You see I can not very well get up to hand you a chair."

No one was more quickly mollified than easy-tempered Fred Dalton, with whom irritation of any kind never lasted long. He sat down at once, and replied, frankly—

"Why, the fact is, Bland, I was beginning to fancy that the sight of me wasn't very welcome; and, in short, that you wanted to cut me."

The answer was somewhat evasive. "It was kind of you to call, Dalton. I am without friends in London, and no one comes near me."

"If you had sent me word about your illness, you would have seen me here before this," returned Fred.

"Thanks; but what made you think of coming now?"

Fred looked, as he felt, confused by this unexpected query, which forced upon him an unpleasant consciousness of the real object of his visit. How could he answer, without committing himself to a falsehood? He could not tell that his errand was a design against the personal liberty of the man whose hand he had just taken in friendship. It seemed to him a sneaking, underhand affair altogether, and he began to feel ashamed of the position which militated against all his notions of honor.

"This comes of my debts and those dreadful I O U's," he said mentally. "If Danson had n't baited his trap in that way, I shouldn't have fallen into it. To think of my father's son letting himself be hired to do another fellow's dirty work! Fred Dalton, it was predicted of you that you would drag the family name through the mire, and you're doing it with a vengeance. Hang it! I'm no hand at this kind of business; and even now I've a good mind to back out altogether, and send Danson word to that effect."

While these thoughts were passing through Fred's mind, the sick man, surprised at his visitor's embarrassed manner, was intently scrutinizing his face. He asked, "What ails you, Dalton?"

"Nothing," blundered Fred, "except that I'm perhaps a little out of sorts with the heat."

But the querist was not satisfied.

"I thought just now that you looked as though you had something on your mind; and, by the way, you haven't yet told me what brought you here. Has any thing happened, Dalton—have you had bad luck?"

"Well, nothing particular, either one way or the other," replied the visitor, who would willingly have caught at any straw in the way of an excuse for his embarrassment. The disgust at his situation was growing more strongly upon him, and he felt more than ever inclined to throw up his part.

"As for coming to see you, Bland," he added, with a desperate attempt to resume his usual easy, off-hand manner, "the fit seized me. I fancied something must be in the wind, as you had n't been seen in the old place lately, and I just mentioned it to a friend who—"

"A friend!" interrupted the other, with a sudden gleam lighting his sunken eyes, and something of fierceness in his tone; "I don't know what friend you could take into confidence about me. Explain yourself, Dalton."

Fred stared blankly at his questioner, with

some dimly-defined idea that he had committed a blunder by his unfortunate reference; and, unconsciously to himself, his answer only tended to make matters worse.

"Well, he mayn't be exactly a friend, but I've seen you playing with him; and when he asked me about you, and seemed to have your

the conviction growing upon him that he had in some way, made a mistake which might prejudice the success of the task he had undertaken.

"I mean the young fellow who was playing with you that night when your losses ran up pretty heavy. If I remember right, you went out together."



Then it was that she told the story of her life.

name so familiar, I concluded that we were all in the same boat."

"What! you surely do not mean the—the—" Here the speaker stopped, apparently overcome by strong agitation, which choked his utterance. Fred hurriedly filled up the sentence,

"His name?" breathed the man, in a scarcely audible whisper, his eyes full of feverish brightness.

"Danson."

"I thought so—I knew it; some instinct told me that he was the man. But what induced you

to talk about me to him?" He added, in increasing excitement, "Never do it again, Dalton! from this night, I warn you, never breathe my name to him, if you would not do harm that you can never repair."

"What do you mean?" faltered Fred, turning pale as he thought of his errand. There must be some mysterious link of association between these two. What was it? Nothing friendly, he felt convinced, for he recalled certain words which had dropped from Mark Danson during their last interview—words which now seemed invested with double significance. He reflected that Mark must have some powerful motive to urge him on, since he had confessed that he would not feel himself at ease until he knew this man Bland to be really out of London. What was his fear concerning him? He had hinted about law business, but that might be only a pretext to disarm his suspicions; for it might be some deep, vindictive purpose which he had rashly pledged himself to aid. Why had Mark evaded explanation, and left him to work blindly in the dark, unless there was something which he feared to bring to light? So argued Fred, getting hopelessly entangled in a maze of conjecture, and working himself into a heat. At that moment the idea occurred to him, that it might be possible to glean something of the truth from Bland himself; and before he ventured a step farther he resolved to try.

"I don't know how to take you, Bland. Of course, I thought Danson was your friend—"

"My friend," repeated the other with peculiar emphasis. "Think how we were engaged, and where it was you saw us; then ask if it is likely for friendship to thrive there."

This was a new kind of reasoning to Fred, and he was painfully puzzled. "Still, you are not enemies," he said, hesitating. "There is surely no reason why you should be."

"No reason," said the man, in his peculiar tone, at the same time giving his visitor a searching look of inquiry; then added, as if recollecting himself, "certainly not; why should there be a reason? We are nothing to each other—nothing—nothing—he would tell you that, if you put the question to him."

These words might have tended to relieve some of Fred's doubt, but for the manner in which they were spoken. Not being satisfied, he kept firm to his resolution, and pursued the subject with a boldness which surprised himself.

"I am glad of it, Bland, for in that case he can have nothing against you. I mean there is nothing to make ill-blood between you, or cause him to be afraid of you in any way."

The sick man started, and one of his thin hands grasped the edge of the table as he said slowly, "Afraid of me? What is the drift of all this, Dalton, for I can tell there is something behind? I know, also, that you came here tonight for another purpose than the one you named just now."

Fred reddened, and looked desperately down

at his boots, almost forgetting himself so far as to seek relief for his feelings in a whistle, saying to himself, "A pretty blundering mess I have made of the affair; Danson will be ready to quarrel with me, only he hasn't much pluck."

The sick man went on excitedly, "Speak out, Dalton: now that you have gone so far, you can not stop half way; my guess was pretty near the mark, for I am convinced that there is more in all this than you like to tell; and you know more concerning Danson than—"

"There you mistake, Bland," interrupted the visitor, earnestly; "I know next to nothing; for he isn't a fellow to enlighten one about himself."

Fred was still, in his own mind irritably dwelling on the old point of dissension between himself and Mark Danson. The listener shook his head.

"You can not alter my conviction, Dalton."

"Well, never mind it, Bland, let us change the subject; this talk excites you, and that must be bad for you in your present weak state. By-the-by, what do you think about trying a change of air? If you could manage to get away into the country for a time, it would help you to pick up faster than any thing."

"Excellent advice, Dalton, but not practical; for such things are not to be managed without funds."

Fred hesitated before he gave his answer. He was treading on dangerous ground, and Bland was keeping such vigilant watch on his face. "But if the means were unexpectedly found? Suppose, now, that some friend came forward with the necessary funds, would you go?"

The sunken eyes seemed trying to read the speaker's inmost thoughts. The answer was given slowly. "I have been so little used to liberality of that kind in my experience of human nature, that I think I should be inclined to distrust the motives of such unexpected benevolence."

Again Fred reddened, and looked uncomfortably conscious. The man went on, "Deal honestly with me, Dalton; I have my own suspicions, which you could not easily remove. No matter what they are, be satisfied that I do not blame you; for, if my surmise is correct, you are only an agent, and you may think that you are doing it for my good."

Fred stammered out his reply, looking away from the gaze that fixed him so steadily.

"Why—what do you mean, Bland?"

"I fancy you can guess, Dalton. I have heard you talk gratefully about a little service that I once did you when you were in trouble. I would do the same again if I had the power; if you believe me, I give you the chance of making me a return now."

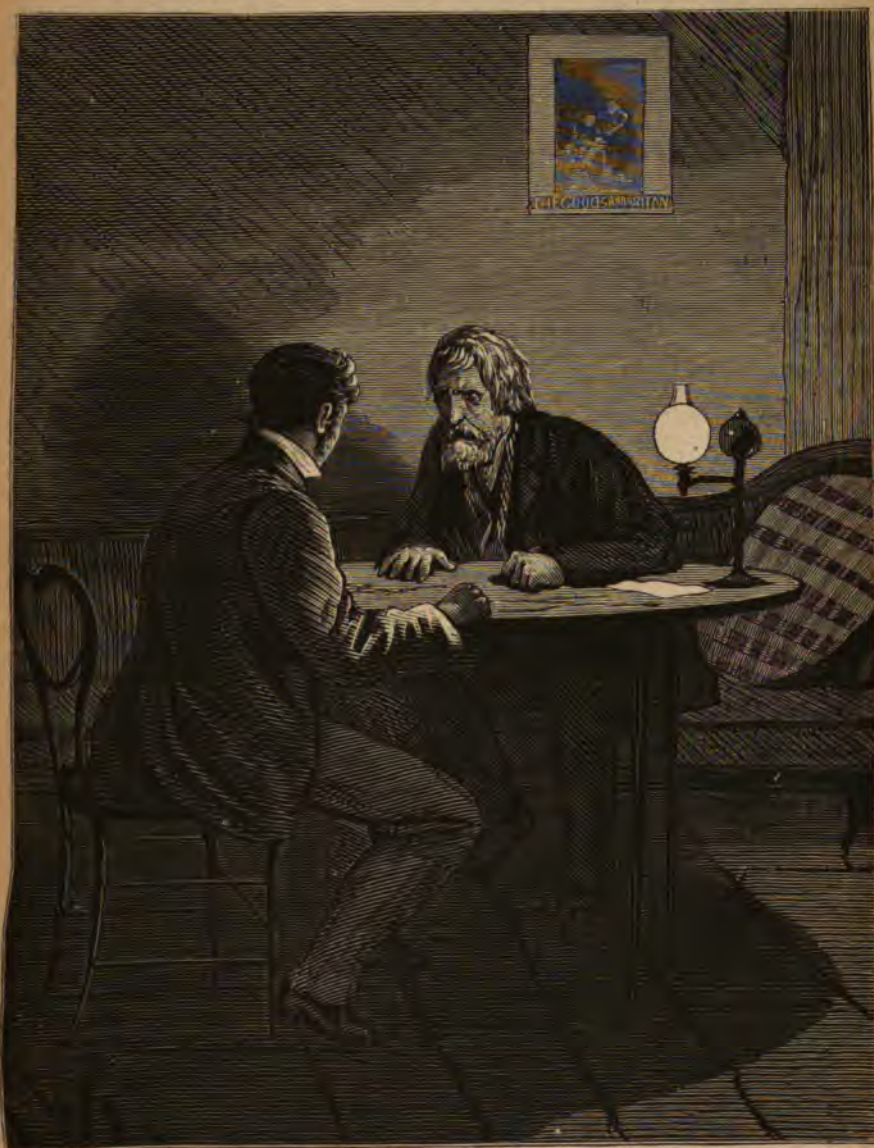
"What can I do?" murmured Fred, helplessly struggling with the conviction that he had signally failed in the errand which he had undertaken for Mark Danson.

"Be honest with me, and confess the truth.



You *do* know a friend who would be pleased by my removal from London; and one who is, perhaps, willing to provide the means. Nay, you need not shrink, I have read it in your face. This obliging friend should have employed some one better skilled in the arts of cunning and deception. Listen, Dalton, I want you to suppose

him out. They meet—no matter how or where—and the parent makes himself known. Perhaps he was repentant, anxious to reform; but the son never gave him a chance, not a moment's hearing: he was only alive to the disgrace, and ready to reproach him for being in existence. He disowned the relationship, and



"Be honest with me, and confess the truth."

the case of a father and son whose lives had been divided. The father—well, we draw the veil of charity over his past. He comes back to England, and after a time, having no near kindred but this one son—who had been reared and educated by his wife's brother—he seeks

they parted, with many bitter things said on both sides—the father threatening to expose all to the rich uncle, whose wealth the son is waiting to inherit."

As he finished, impulsive Fred, who had been listening with dilating eyes and eager, parted

lips, let his hand fall on the table with a heavy thump that threatened danger to Mrs. Dale's fragile lamp. A wild probability had just flashed upon his mind, and he could find no other vent for his excited feelings. "Why, Bland, you bewilder me; surely you do not mean to say—"

"That the story is true and the characters known to you," the sick man added, slowly.

"To me! then you must be—" He stopped, and the other finished the sentence.

"Not Bland, as you call me, but Danson, Mark's father."

In return for this information Fred threw back his head, and gazed blankly at the speaker for some seconds before he found voice to answer. "His father! Ah! now I see it all. He was afraid of you letting out things to the old governor, and this is the reason why he kept such a tight hand on his secrets; but I'm glad it's all come out and I've done with the business, for I'd rather be sent to prison for debt twice over, than be mixed up with any thing of this sort. To think of you being his father! why couldn't he come to you himself, and try to make it up between you? I've never been a credit to any body belonging to me, and I've said and done many things to my old dad that I'm sorry for; but, hang it, this is too bad!" And, in the fullness of his feelings, Fred here poured out a confession of all that had passed between himself and Mark Danson during their walk through the square; adding, with a rueful look, "I know I'm to blame for agreeing to come to you on such an errand; but that bill was the bait that drew me on."

The man mused a moment, then asked, "When have you arranged to see him again?" Fred named the night.

"If you can manage to wait, Dalton, I'll try to write a note for you to take to him."

The visitor eagerly agreed to this proposal, and Mark's father divided the sheet of paper on which he had commenced the letter to Charles Rivers, and again took the pen in his trembling hand.

It was growing late when Fred left with the note in his pocket. But, as he took his way through the narrow street in the calm summer night, he felt a sense of relief in the failure of his errand; and, undismayed by any fear of consequences on his own account, registered to himself a vow that it should be the last time he would undertake any private business for Mark Danson.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### WAITING.

It was the morning after the strange visit of Giles Royton to the home of the Crawtons, when, urged on by the repeated entreaties of his daughter Eleanor, the old clerk had at last conquered his weak irresolution, and commenced his task of tardy justice to Hugh Craw-

ton. If he had left it a few weeks longer, it would have been too late, as the steamer in which Mark Danson was urging his cousin to take a passage would then have sailed for Melbourne. The young man had decided to avail himself of the opportunity thus opened to him, gently putting aside the united persuasion of Margaret and his friend Charles Rivers; also the fretful remonstrance of his father, who considered himself the principal person concerned in the departure of Hugh, and the one to whom it would be a special deprivation. He could foresee that it would be very dreary to have only women about him, for his son had been a sort of link between himself and the busy world out of doors; then he was useful to him in many ways. So he chose to regard his going away as a personal injury.

And what of Mrs. Crawton? True to the guiding principle of her brave life of endurance and sacrifice, she kept silent, and added nothing to the household chorus of murmurings, though the shadow of the coming separation rested darkest upon her: and her heart ached with a dull pain at every chance allusion to it. But the wistful mother's eye had read the truth that her boy had set his heart upon the plan of emigration. And though she realized beforehand that the young voyager would take out with him the brightest part of her own life, she would not come between him and his chance of better fortune, or do any thing to damp his spirit of enterprise.

"What is my suffering compared with his well-doing and success in life? If God wills it, he will go, and it must be for the best. Besides, the dear boy will have enough to bear without adding sorrow of mine."

Thus she argued, forcing herself to speak only cheering words of encouragement and hope. So it was that even Hugh never suspected the depth of his mother's grief on the subject of their parting, nor guessed what a heavy cross it would be for her to bear.

Though the young man had passed a sleepless night, he rose early. Long before the rest of the household were awake, he was up and dressed, sitting at the open window of his room, and cooling his forehead in the fresh morning air, with full liberty to enjoy the not very charming perspective of back gardens by way of prospect. But he was engrossed with far different thoughts. It was no unoccupied mind that flushed his face and gave his eyes their bright eager look as he watched the little brown sparrows hopping fearlessly about the narrow gravel walks, and chirping their morning salutations to each other, while the dewdrops glistened gem-like upon the flower borders. Even in that little suburban garden, with its boundary line of green wooden railings, every thing seemed fresh and fair and bright with the glow of promise, like the awakening dawn of hope in his own heart. It was the day on which he had appointed to meet his cousin Mark, to talk over his prospects, and decide upon arrangements for his voyage. It was also the

day on which Giles Royton had promised to make his important revelation to Daniel Cawton. But what strange whim had made the old clerk bind him to secrecy, not even to give a hint of the good news to Mark, who (apart from any personal feeling of friendship towards himself), as one of the partners, and the future head of the firm, might naturally be expected to take special interest in any information that would throw light on the mysterious affair of the missing check, and lead to its discovery?

Thus reasoned Hugh in his simplicity and unsuspecting faith in Mark Danson. But he could not whisper it even to those at home, though his brain was in a whirl of confused thought, and his heart beating wildly with anticipation; while he had to parry Margaret's curiosity about Giles Royton's unexpected visit and evade her natural inquiries. Above all, when he said, "Good-night" to his mother, he had found it so hard to restrain himself from dropping his head on her shoulder, and pouring out the history of all that had passed between himself and the old clerk. She was the first to whom he had gone on that day of his sore trouble and disgrace; and now when the dark cloud was about to break, and the first rift of light was showing itself, it seemed selfish and cruel not to share the knowledge with her. But he had given his word to Royton, who had doubtless some sufficient reason of his own, which he would explain in due time; so nothing remained but to wait the issue of events.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### "THEM FURREN PARTS."

How long that morning was to Hugh's impatient fancy! the minutes seem to drag themselves into hours; and as he listened to the measured ticking of the old clock on the stairs, he became dissatisfied even with that time-honored family relic, which had commanded such high respect from him in his boyhood.

"How slowly the time goes," he muttered. "I could even fancy that the old clock is lagging behind; and it seems to me that the family don't intend to rise this morning. Ah! that must be Chriss going down stairs."

A fit of restlessness was upon him; he grew tired of watching the sparrows, and left his seat at the window to begin pacing the narrow limits of his room by way of relief for his feelings.

"At last—at last—there is hope of light and freedom from this doubt, which would have been always a blighting brand upon my life. My innocence once proved, I shall go out to the new land fearing nothing, hoping every thing, for if God spares me in health and strength, I can work and save for the old people, give father the chance of visiting a warmer climate, and let dear mother fold her hands and rest after all her toil. Then, if I prosper, who knows but I may even be able to help Madge with a

wedding-portion—that is, if her ladyship does not forestall me by going off before I achieve my fortune?"

The young man's face glowed, and his eyes sparkled as he went on with his aerial architecture, building castles for those he loved. But the next moment the bright look was overcast with a serious shade of thought, and he stopped suddenly in his walk.

"What if Giles Royton fails to keep his word? No, no; I will not think that he would mislead me so cruelly. He said that he would as soon trifle with his own life, and I believe him; he promised to tell all, and he said he could prove his words. At last, Daniel Cawton will know I have not abused his trust in me, that I was not ungrateful and unworthy. To think that all will be made clear to him before I leave England! I thank thee, God, for this mercy."

Here the broad chest heaved, and utterly overcome by his feelings, poor Hugh dropped into a chair, and gave way as he had never done since the day of his discharge, when he brought home his wounded heart, and poured the miserable news into his mother's pitying ear. It was characteristic of Hugh Cawton's generous nature that, engrossed with the thought of his innocence being about to be proved, he seemed (for the time) to have completely lost sight of the fact that it had been the treacherous work of some unknown enemy.

"How glad Mark will be about this discovery! I wish I could tell him at once."

Simple-hearted, noble Hugh! It was sad to think of such perfect, confiding trust in another, rudely shaken as it would be when Giles Royton had fulfilled his promise.

"I have hours yet to wait before I know any thing, for I am not to meet Mark till after dinner. It's no use, I must do something to keep my hands busy and help the time to pass."

Acting on this idea, he hurried down stairs, and out to the garden, a glance into the sitting-room, as he passed, showing him that it was still empty. He had taken possession of a garden-rake, and was making himself busy about some of the beds, when he heard his name suddenly called, and, looking up, saw Chriss coming towards him and endeavoring to attract his attention by animated gestures with a blacklead brush, which she carried in her hand.

"Good-morning, Chriss. Do you want me?"

"Yes, Mr. Hugh. I've been on the watch for you this half-hour, for I thought you'd be coming down first."

Hugh suspended operations with his rake, and stood patiently waiting for further information.

"There's something I want to say to you, Mr. Hugh, unknown to any body else."

"What is it, Chriss?" he asked, looking with considerable curiosity at the old servant. There was an expression in her eyes that was new to him and the rugged face was pinched and puckered into innumerable wrinkles. Some powerful anxiety was working upon her mind. She advanced a few steps nearer, casting a backward

glance at the house-windows, as if to assure herself that no one was looking on, then said, in a low, confidential voice—

"First, I want to know if you're quite bent on going away to them farren parts, Mr. Hugh?"

"Yes, Chriss, I mean to go out and make my fortune."

"Fortune, indeed!" murmured the old servant, with a gloomy shake of her head. At the same moment she absently rubbed her chin with the blacklead brush, leaving a dark smear that produced a rather ludicrous effect.

The truth was that Chriss had been fretting inwardly from the time she first caught a whisper about Hugh's emigration to Australia. Next to her mistress, he had been her idol from babyhood. She was never tired of arguing the subject to herself: "Here he was, after going through more sickness than most children—for he took the measles much worse than Miss Margaret, and fought through whooping-cough that would have killed a score of babies with less spirit, and now, after growing up to be a fine handsome young man, he must be going off and trying to tempt Providence by running the risk of being swallowed up by fishes, or killed and eaten by cannibals." This was the view which she now put to him in her own graphic way. But he only ran his fingers through his curly hair, and laughed merrily.

"Why, Chriss, this is all very silly, and I should be vexed with you, only your talk seems to cheer me up this morning; it's something like taking a tonic."

"I don't know nor care about tonics," she replied, dubiously; "but I do know that you've no business to think of going away, Mr. Hugh."

"Well, then, Chriss, all that I can say is that you are a most incorrigible old woman. But what is this?—what are you doing?"

These questions were called forth by a most extraordinary action on the part of Chriss, who had taken from her pocket a small canvas bag, which she was trying to push stealthily into his hand. He caught the chink of money, and the crisp rustle of paper, which he rightly guessed to be bank-notes. It was the remains of a legacy which she had lately inherited from a deceased uncle, to which she had added some small savings of her own—a little hoard which she had kept, as she phrased it, to come in for a rainy day, which meant a time of need, either for herself or her mistress.

Wondering, Hugh repeated his question, "What is this, Chriss?"

"Something for you to take with you, for my sake, if you must go."

The color flushed into Hugh's face as he said, decisively, "What! take your hard-earned money? I couldn't do it, Chriss."

"It's no earnings of mine—at least very little of it," responded the capitalist, almost angrily. "It may be of use to you in them furren parts, and I don't want it."

"But, my good Chriss, I can not take it," persisted Hugh trying to put the bag back in

her hand. It was rejected with something between an indignant gulp and a sob.

"I won't have it, so it may just go. You won't take it from me, Mr. Hugh, and it's pride; though I did teach you to walk when you was a baby-boy, you turn round and deny me that bit of pleasure. But I might have known you'd be above me now, and I ought to keep my place better."

Here the old servant fumbled suspiciously with the corner of her apron, and made a movement to turn away.

She was stopped by her young master. "Well, well, my good Chriss, since you put it in that light, I suppose I must do as you bid me; but remember, it is to be only as a loan, to be paid back with interest. I could not take it from you on any other condition; it would not be just, Chriss."

At that moment the voice of Margaret was heard calling for her brother, and the next instant the young lady made her appearance in the passage. Then Chriss was glad to hurry away, congratulating herself on having successfully carried her point, and feeling in her own mind, greatly relieved and comforted by her little investment of capital.

## CHAPTER L.

### GILES ROYTON'S REVELATION.

DANIEL CRAWTON sat alone in his private office. The junior partner had contented himself with giving a few hours to business in the morning, and then left, pleading an engagement with a friend as an excuse for his absence during the afternoon. The old merchant sat at his desk, his chin resting in his hand, and the warm light falling strongly on his bent, gray head and thought-lined face. He was unoccupied in business hours—an unusual state of things for the man self-disciplined and trained to a life of daily plodding industry, with his untiring energy of hand and brain. But, lately a strange weakness seemed creeping over him. The vital forces were held together with less vigor in that powerful frame, hitherto remarkable for its perfect physical preservation. The light seemed to be wasting in the lamp, and now, as he sat, he looked worn and drooping and aged. It was not like him to succumb to weariness at midday—the man who had always eschewed self-indulgence of any kind, and modelled his life according to his own stern theories of labor, husbanding his time as though the minutes were so much gold.

"I scarcely know what to make of Mark," he murmured, thinking aloud, a habit which had grown upon him in his solitude. "I begin to fear that his habits are hardly those of a business man. Then his temper seems unequal, and he takes sudden fits of restlessness. I could almost fancy, from his manner, that he has made proposals to May Rivers, and been



refused. I have found out that he has no chance there, and he is an idiot if he has not been able to make the discovery for himself. I would put the question to him, only it is my way never to force confidence where I feel it is withheld."

Here the old man relapsed into a reverie, which was broken by one of the junior clerks, who came with some business question, which seemed to belong to the cashier's department, for he was curtly dismissed, and referred to that individual, who was the one that had succeeded Hugh Cawton.

This interruption, and the mention of the cashier, had the effect of changing the current of the merchant's thoughts. He took out a memorandum-book, turned to a particular page, and sighed as he read over some of the entries.

"More than twelve months, and, from what I hear, he has never got employment since. How have they lived? Robert's annuity would be wretchedly small to meet such necessities, and they have never once applied to me for help. It may be that they blame me for harshness to the lad, and she—she among the rest, for I remember he is her only son. Would that I had never seen him! He did me a service once—perhaps the greatest that one human creature can do for another. And he was so like *her*; even that last day he seemed to look at me with his mother's eyes. Perhaps I was to blame for putting him in the way of temptation, which he was not strong enough to resist; and yet I watched him so closely, and found him so different to Robert: no trace of his selfishness and feeble narrowness of mind. By this time I should have learned to have no more idols; but I could have taken that lad to my heart—nearer, nearer, than all the rest, even Mark, who never crossed me, and has made himself a pattern in most things. But, for Hugh, I would give now more than half the wealth which it has been the work of my life to win, if he could only prove himself innocent, and I could raise him again to the position from which he has fallen."

At that moment, as if in answer to his thoughts, and before he had time to compose his troubled face, there was a low, hesitating knock at the door, which seemed to imply some sort of apprehension in the person outside, and gave the impression of want of confidence in himself, or his errand. Daniel Cawton knew the intruder from his knock; but his mind was, that day, so strangely out of tune, that he inwardly groaned at the necessity which forced his attention to business.

He spoke irritably. "Is that you, Royton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come in."

In obedience to which, the old clerk immediately presented himself on the threshold. The door swung noiselessly back to its place, but without attempting to advance, he still stood in the same spot, hesitating and irresolute, till the master asked, impatiently, "Well, Royton, why

do you stand there without speaking? if you have any thing to say, say it at once."

"Yes, sir, I have something to say; that is, if you are at liberty to listen. I want to have some private talk with you, sir," he added, humbly.

"Private talk with me!" repeated the merchant in a tone of unmistakable surprise, knitting his massive brow and measuring the clerk with a broad stare of inquiry. The expression of drooping weariness was gone, and all his keen perceptions were on the alert to meet the requirements of the moment. He was again the man of indomitable energy and calm, collected mental power. He made a sign for Giles Royton to come nearer, which he instantly obeyed, making a desperate effort to overcome his habitual awe of Daniel Cawton.

"Now, Royton, please to explain your strange words, for I am at a loss to know why you want private talk with me."

"I scarcely know how to begin, sir," faltered the clerk, "for I know it is a subject on which you have forbidden any one to speak, and I shall have to throw myself on your forbearance and mercy."

"Go on," said the voice, whose stern tone of command almost scattered the courage which the speaker had gathered to his aid; but he managed to get out the words: "What I have to say, sir, concerns your nephew."

"My nephew; why not speak to Mr. Mark himself?"

A faint flush stole into Giles Royton's face as he replied, "Not Mr. Mark, sir, but our late cashier, Mr. Hugh Cawton."

The merchant started and looked keenly at the speaker, a frown gathering darkly over his face: none would have guessed what a pang of pain the unexpected mention of that name had shot through his heart. Giles Royton did not guess it; he found his master's reception of the subject so forbidding, that his resolution almost failed him, and he was at that moment sorely in need of his daughter's sustaining help.

The merchant spoke coldly. "I am aware, Royton, that you are one of the few who unavoidably became acquainted with the facts of that unhappy business. You know also my wish for strict silence to be observed respecting it. A seal has been set upon it hitherto, which, as an old and trusted servant, I should not suppose that you would break now without some sufficient reason."

"Yes, sir, I have reason," replied Giles Royton, at last stung into boldness: "but I will tell what I know and you shall judge for yourself. My fault lies in keeping that seal of silence when I should have broken it."

"What do you mean, Royton?"

"That I have been a weak-minded, selfish coward, and played with the truth, thinking to serve my own ends; and held my tongue when I ought to have spoken out for the sake of justice to an innocent man, and the detection of a villain."

A deadly paleness overspread the old man's face; he put his hand to his head as though the words had stunned him, and his frame seemed to reel and tremble in his chair. The clerk feared that he was going to faint, and instinctively stepped forward to offer him support; but Daniel Cawton gathered himself up, and found voice to speak.

"Royton, you talk in riddles. Did you say justice to the innocent? You can not mean—No, no, I will not delude myself by any such vain hope. Explain—explain, Royton!"

"Yes, sir, I have been wanting to do it for months past, but hadn't courage to set about the work. If I hadn't been a coward, or something worse, I should never have let Mr. Hugh be sent away at a minute's notice, for a thing he had no more hand in, or knowledge of than yourself."

"Royton! what is this you are saying? If they are only words without foundation, and you have dared to make such a cruel mockery, I will never forgive you—never, never!"

"You need not fear, sir; I have proof enough to satisfy any judge or jury in England. See here, Mr. Cawton, you will recognize this, for you have seen something like it before;" and hastily searching his pocket, the clerk drew out a soiled, blotted piece of paper, which he unfolded and placed in his master's hand. It was a duplicate copy of the receipt for £200, paid in on Lever and Balderstone's account, and signed by Hugh Cawton, like the original document which had supplied such crushing evidence against the suspected cashier. But there was some significant difference about the paper which Giles Royton submitted to his master; it showed frequent marks of blundering, repetitions, and erasures, where the real handwriting of the forger had insensibly cropped out upon that which he was trying to imitate.

The merchant's face blanched, and his hand shook as his glance fell upon it, and he asked, tremblingly, "Where does this come from, Royton? and—and what does it mean?"

"That this receipt and the one like it are forgeries, sir, like the figures in the cash-book; for that £200 of Lever and Balderstone's did not happen to fall into Mr. Hugh's hands. He never touched it, and he never knew that the book had been tampered with, any more than you did."

"He did not, you say—he did not! Oh, my boy—my boy! Innocent! thank God!"

There was a brief but most expressive silence, which the merchant was the first to break.

"Now it remains for me to inquire farther into this strange discovery; it has plainly been the work of some one who—"

He stopped, but the clerk finished the sentence for him. "Some one who had a design to ruin Mr. Hugh."

"Do you know the author of this infamous work?"

"Yes, sir, to my sorrow I do."

"Does he hold office in this firm?"

"Y-e-s," was the hesitating answer.

"Tell me his name. I must sift the matter at once, for my nephew must be cleared."

In reply, Giles Royton smoothed out another soiled piece of paper, which he had kept in his hand—a torn, crumpled corner of a sheet, on which the name of Mark Danson was traced in bold, legible characters.

He handed it to his master, saying, "If you have not destroyed it, sir, you will be able to match this with the other part."

It was the piece which had been purposely torn from the betting voucher, found in Hugh Cawton's drawer. The merchant took it wonderingly.

"You remember the betting voucher, sir? that belongs to it: you will find that the parts fit together."

Daniel Cawton's lips moved, but no sound came. At last he found voice to falter, "Why do you give me this, Royton?"

The clerk was sensible of a sudden stir of pity for his master. He knew what a shock his next words would give.

"You asked me for his name, sir; it is there; that paper belonged to him; he had others of the same kind."

The merchant dropped into his chair, as though he had been suddenly struck down. "My nephew, Mark Danson! Oh, it can not be!"

Then it was Giles Royton's painful task to again go over the story, which he had related to Hugh Cawton. Step by step he unfolded the dark meshes of Mark Danson's villainy, followed by the rapt, strained attention of the listener, who sat with bowed head, not interrupting by a single word, while he went on piling up the condemning evidence against the trusted, favored one, upon whose gratitude the uncle had such heavy claims. All was exposed—the hidden gambling sins, with all the specious acts of deception by which he had blinded even the keen-sighted principal; and, lastly, his secret marriage. All was told; nor did the narrator spare himself. He freely admitted the motives which had led him to keep the secret, and made a humble, penitent confession of his own besetting sin, which had put him in the power of Mark Danson.

"We will talk this over another time, Royton," sighed his master. "At present, our first thought must be for the one who has suffered most—Hugh Cawton. Have you seen him lately?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does he know what his cousin has done?" he asked, bringing out his words with painful difficulty.

"No, sir. I told him all except the name, which I purposely kept back until to-day, when I meant to tell him in my own way. I believe they are great friends; Mr. Mark is persuading him to emigrate (a scheme to get him out of the way): they meet by appointment to-day to make arrangements."

"Ah! then that was his engagement," muttered the merchant in parenthesis.

The speaker went on: "I gave Mr. Hugh a hint that I should drop in upon them as if by accident; but he knows nothing further. I bound him to secrecy; for I have my own reasons for wishing to meet Mr. Mark face to face."

Daniel Crawton said nothing, but rang the bell, gave some needful attention to business for the next few minutes, and issued some orders in a hard, dry, mechanical tone; then he turned to the clerk, saying, curtly, "Now, Royton, in five minutes I shall be ready to go with you."



"Tell me his name."

But I meant to ask if you would go with me, sir?"

"Yes, I will," was the decisive answer.

Giles Royton glanced at the mantel clock, saying, "We shall be in good time to catch them together, sir."

## CHAPTER LI.

### ENLIGHTENED.

THEY made a striking group, the four thus strangely brought together, Mark Danson, conscience-stricken, and quailing under the search-

ing gaze which he feared most to meet. Hugh Crawton, with his heart in a tumult of conflicting feelings, visibly astonished by his uncle's unexpected visit, which he was uncertain how to interpret, and wondering at Mark's evident agitation, which was utterly inexplicable to him. Not the least excited of the party was Giles Royton, who kept close to his master's side, as though he found some sense of protection in being near him. Was it that he feared the anger of Eleanor's husband? To Hugh's increasing bewilderment, he detected a look which his cousin flashed at the old clerk—a strange look, half-sullen and half-defiant, yet with something of despairing pleading in it. He noted, also, the altered expression of the smooth face which, a few minutes ago, he had seen smiling so pleasantly—an expression of painfully intense anxiety that pinched it into unnatural lines, and gave it a look so ghastly and haggard that it startled Hugh. The head was bent forward, and the chest and shoulders seemed to have contracted, as if for warmth after a sudden chill. The whole figure of the young man had a shrunken, cowering look, as though still writhing under some crushing blow and waiting for another to fall. Hugh made his observations, but the only result was, that he was unable to account for any thing he saw; for, as yet, not a shade of suspicion had crossed his mind with reference to Mark Danson, in whom his simple faith still remained unshaken.

Not a word was spoken until Daniel Crawton, contenting himself with one full, steady look into Mark's face, walked to Hugh's side and took his hand; all the angry light dying out from his eyes, and giving place to a far different expression, in which every severe line was, for the moment, relaxed and softened. His face was still heavily overshadowed, and there was a contraction of pain about the mouth which had been there from the moment that he heard Giles Royton's revelation; for the startling discovery of the unworthiness of Mark, the adopted son, about whose future he had framed so many high hopes, had been a sharp stab to the proud, honorable heart of the old merchant. His voice was the first that broke the silence; but not one of his hearers suspected what a struggle it cost him to speak so firmly. It was characteristic of him to go direct to the point without any preparation. "Hugh Crawton, I know now the truth about that strange business of the missing check and the fraudulent entries in the cash-book, which ended in your being falsely accused and unjustly condemned. The base plot against you, conceived with some inscrutable design of evil which at present I can not fathom"—here his glance wandered sternly to the shrinking face of the unhappy Mark—"worked only too successfully; and perhaps," he added slowly, "the fault was chiefly my own. It might have been that I was rash and blind in too readily accepting the evidence, but to outward appearances it was conclusive enough, and I acted as seemed right to my convictions under the circumstances.

I never forgot that you once did me a great service, Hugh, and afterwards, up to the time we mention, you kept your place and served me faithfully in it. Still I did not spare you any more than I would have spared another in your place. I thought I owed it as a duty to myself and others to make no exemption in your favor."

Here his grasp tightened over Hugh's hand, which he still held in his own, and something in his look made the young man's heart thrill with a sudden sensation of joy, as he asked himself if it were possible that he had ever gained any hold upon the regard of Uncle Daniel—his own exalted type of honor, integrity, and high principle.

The merchant continued: "You will believe me when I say how deeply I regret that any thing like this should have occurred in my employment, also the wrong done to yourself, for which, perhaps, reparation can not be made in the full sense. It is needless to say that you shall be cleared, my boy—acquitted with honor in the minds of all who know any thing of this sad affair. That shall be my first care; and, for the rest, I am very thankful to have you proved innocent, Hugh, and to find that you have cast no stain of disgrace upon your name. Whatever may have been their failings, the Crawtons always liked to keep their family honor; whatever their personal enmities and quarrels among themselves, they never stooped to do underhand injuries—never gave those stabs in the dark which have almost as much of the evil spirit of the assassin in them, though only levelled against a man's character and good name instead of his life."

Again the stern glance wandered to Mark's face. A few seconds more, the uncle held the hand of his nephew, as if it were some recovered treasure on which he had set a price; his voice taking a lower, gentler tone, and such wonderful softness falling upon his face as he spoke words which sunk into the young man's heart, never to be forgotten.

"And now," continued the merchant, raising his voice, "what remains for us is to proceed with the inquiry, Hugh. I believe Giles Royton has already made you aware that this has been the work of an enemy, whose design must have been to damage your character with the firm; but he did not tell you his name."

The clerk, who still managed to keep near his master, here drew himself into the talk by answering for Hugh Crawton. "I promised Mr. Hugh that I would tell him to-day."

Mark Danson heard the words. It might have been observed that the hand which rested on the arm of the couch opened and closed with a convulsive movement, and his light eyes shot an indescribable glance at the speaker from their lowered lids; but Giles Royton did not look towards him, and the merchant still kept his face turned to Hugh, whom he still exclusively addressed. "Tell me frankly, Hugh—I know now that I may rely upon your word—tell me,

during all the time that you held a situation in our firm, both as clerk and cashier, do you recollect any circumstance that might tend to make you any enemies among your fellow-workers?"

Hugh gave a decided negative.

"Can you think of any individual who would be likely to have a selfish interest in getting you discharged?"

"Not one," replied Hugh, reflectively.

"And you have really no suspicion in your mind, concerning the person who did you that cowardly injury?"

"I have not," faltered Hugh, now powerfully agitated. "I can not remember one among your clerks who ever gave me cause to think they were other than friendly towards me."

How Mark winced under those words, so full of touching candor and good faith in others. He had taken much pains to secure for himself the esteem and confidence of generous-hearted Hugh; and now, when he knew it was impossible to retain either, he discovered that they were really of value to him. What torture to be compelled to sit through that terrible interview, listening while that stern voice, which he dreaded more than any other in the world, read out the verdict of his condemnation; and that keen, shrewd intelligence inexorably dissected his schemes, tracked out every unworthy act, and penetrated all the disreputable secrets which it had been the labor of his life to keep from such detection. To be thus unmasked by his hand, and in the presence of the one whom he had injured, with the additional sting of knowing that what he had conspired for his cousin's ruin would now serve to fix him more firmly than ever in the regard of Daniel Cawton, who for the sake of justice and the mere sense of what was due to his young relative, as reparation, would feel himself bound to give him that high place in his favor which Hugh had so well deserved. All this Mark Danson knew, and it added much to that bitter hour of his humiliation and defeat. He drew his breath in short, quick gasps, and cast helpless, longing glances towards the door; but he felt that escape was impossible: the dreaded investigation must go on.

Daniel Cawton's look was very grave, as he dropped his hold of Hugh's hand, saying, "And now for the bitter truth, which must not be longer kept back. I am sorry, Hugh, that your trust in human nature should be shaken thus early in life—especially that one of your kindred and mine, and one, too, who has professed to be your friend, should have proved himself such a traitor."

The speaker's voice gathered more sternness with the last words. He had taken out his pocket-book, and Hugh caught the rustling of paper, as he crushed something in his hand, and turned somewhat abruptly away, making a sign to the clerk, and murmuring in his ear, "Now you may tell him the name."

Then, in obedience to that agitated whisper,

with a strong return of the pity for his old master which had moved him during their interview in the office, Giles Royton drew aside the bewildered Hugh, and in a low, hurried voice told the astounding fact that Mark Danson was his unknown enemy—the forger of the fraudulent receipt for the check—the malicious agent who had conveyed the betting voucher into his drawer, that it might tell against his private morals, and ruin his prospects by offending a well-known principle of the head of the firm.

Hugh seemed utterly stunned by this information, for which he was so little prepared. He dropped into the nearest seat, and his lips whitened and trembled, as he repeated, slowly, "My Cousin Mark, to have done this to me!" He looked across the room, through a sort of dim haze which surrounded the figures of the uncle and nephew. The old man standing before the crouching figure on the couch, holding out a paper, and like one in a dream. Hugh heard the well-known voice, saying, sternly—

"There is no chance left for you to vindicate yourself, and as little as you have spared others can you hope to be spared in your turn. Subterfuge and denial will avail you nothing. I know now the full extent of your deceptions, and my blindness, even if other evidence were wanting, here is proof positive of your guilt, for you will not dare to deny this," holding forward the duplicate receipt. "Nor this," he added, joining the torn piece that belonged to the betting voucher, which, as Giles Royton guessed, he had preserved in his possession.

Mark's face grew livid, as a sense of the hopelessness of his position forced itself upon him; and a strange look swept over his face—a wild, hunted look—as of some animal brought to bay. He raised his head as he spoke. "I shall attempt nothing in my own extenuation, uncle, as I know it would be useless in the present state of your feelings towards me. Perhaps it is all owing to my being a Danson." This was added with something of a sneer, which Daniel Cawton was too excited to perceive. "But with regard to that man—your informer," continued the speaker, bitterly, pointing to Giles Royton, "I must confess that I failed in my duty there, by allowing you to keep in your employ a clerk whom I knew to be utterly unworthy—an habitual gambler, who ought to have been dismissed four years ago."

It was well for Giles Royton that his penitent confession to his master had forestalled and rendered comparatively powerless this vindictive retaliation of Mark Danson, who was much disappointed at the effect of what he had intended as a crushing denunciation against the clerk.

His uncle replied, "Whatever may have been Royton's wrong-doing, Mark, you should feel that you put it out of your place to become his accuser, when you linked yourself with his family and became the husband of his daughter; a tie which you have since so basely tried to keep secret from the world. And with regard to the father, I am not likely to forget that, unworthy



as you thought him, you would still have been willing to grant him a continuance of favor, if you could thereby have bribed him to keep your secrets."

Mark silently writhed at this retort. The clerk had advanced a few steps forward, indignant color flushing his cheeks, and unwonted light in his eyes. He was about to speak to Mark, but Daniel Cawton interposed between them, saying, in a low tone, "Angry altercation will avail you nothing; leave him to me now, and for the rest, depend upon my word that your daughter shall have justice, so far as it can be rendered to her. Poor girl! that secret marriage was a false step for her; but in this instance the fault has brought even more than its own punishment."

Here he looked anxiously towards Hugh, who instantly left his seat and came to him. He let his hand rest for an instant on the young man's arm, Mark Danson watching them with lowered eyes. It heightened the bitterness of that hour to witness such signs of restored confidence and amity between those two.

The merchant spoke in the same subdued tone. "I shall also ask you to leave us, Hugh; you will understand why I think it best for us all not to prolong this scene; but I hope to see you again soon. God bless you, my boy! It is a relief to be able to regard you once more in the old light. I have often felt that I would rather have seen you buried, than know you were living and unworthy of a thought. It is sad enough when the grave takes those we care for, but to have them lost to us by that other moral death, is worse than all."

Hugh returned the hearty pressure of the old man's hand, not sorry to have the wretched interview cut short, and be spared the necessity of saying any thing to his cousin. His heart was too full for speech, and he felt that words would almost have choked him, even if he could have had them ready at command, which he doubted. Then he was impatient to hurry home, to rejoice the hearts that loved him, with the unexpected news, which would always make that day memorable for him. So he was glad to follow Giles Royton, and the two left the hotel together, leaving the uncle and nephew alone, neither of them having a thought of anticipation about the results that were likely to arise out of their strange meeting, and both unconscious how that severe day of trial would end for Daniel Cawton.

## CHAPTER LII.

### STRICKEN.

THERE was silence between Mark Danson and his uncle for some minutes after Hugh Cawton and the clerk had left them. The old merchant began rapidly pacing the room, as though the necessity for action was strong upon him—a habit peculiar to himself in moments of great excitement. The nephew still kept his

seat upon the couch, preserving the same shrinking attitude, his hand shading his eyes, from which cover he tried to catch stealthy views of his uncle's face, as he passed and re-passed in that continuous tramp, to and fro, which betrayed so much of the disturbance of his mind and the fierce struggle of feeling that was going on while he walked, with that convulsive working of the muscles of his mouth, knitting his massive brows together until the deep gray eyes were nearly hidden. "If I had been like Robert," he groaned inwardly, "given up to small irritations and absorbed in self, I could throw off these things with more philosophy; as it is, they seem like so many blows against my life. I have not given much quarter to the affections—not encouraged many objects of regard. My nature has struck out few roots, but those few have not been wanting in strength. It may be that I let my sympathies run in too narrow a groove—depended too much upon external proprieties, and set too much value upon fixed rules of conduct. Is this the penalty—to be miserably deceived and disappointed in one whom I favored more than all, and from whom I hoped so much? Oh, Margaret, my sister! is this the son that you gave me on your death-bed?"

At last the restless walk ceased, and the old merchant stopped in front of his nephew; it might have been noticed that within the last few moments his step had lost something of its steadiness, and once or twice he had put his hand suddenly to his head—significant signs, if Mark had not been too deeply engrossed with his own situation to regard them; for even as Daniel Cawton stood with his face looking so gray and grim in its severity, the body seemed to have a strange swaying motion, as if its muscular control was weakened. "Mark!" The young man gave an involuntary start, at the tone of the voice which pronounced his name; it sounded so changed and hollow. "I have some questions to ask, which I trust you will answer honestly." He paused an instant, but Mark did not avail himself of the opportunity to speak. His uncle continued: "To say nothing of the double part which you have played in your successful career of deception, and the unworthy motives which appear to have led you from one base action to another, even setting aside the manner in which you have deceived me individually, I want you to tell me the truth about this last wretched business of the forgery and the check; how you managed to ensure yourself against detection, and what design you had in plotting the ruin of your cousin, Hugh Cawton."

The questions were given inexorably sharp and distinct, with a tone of command from which there was no resistance or escape. Mark kept his eyes down, fixing them desperately upon the carpet, and making a despairing circuit of the legs of surrounding chairs, looking anywhere and at any thing, except the face near him.

Daniel Cawton repeated his last question.

"Answer me, Mark. What made you such a traitor to one whose interests you always professed to study?"

Thus goaded with the dread of his uncle, and a certain feeling of helplessness in the conviction that Giles Royton's revelations had left him no loophole for self-defense, and driven almost to desperation, Mark gasped out something of the truth, humiliating as it was. "I—I can't exactly say; you are pressing me too hard; but I do know that I had always a fear of Hugh Cawton, even before I saw him—fear that if you were ever brought together he might supplant me in your regard, and come between us. When you took him into the office, I marked how he grew in your esteem; every day seemed tending to confirm my worst dread, and it maddened me to think of myself thrust out from that place in your favor, which I had come to consider as mine by right."

"And for this mean jealousy, Mark—a feeling so pitiable for any man to stoop to—you try to destroy one who had never wronged you in thought, word, or deed; there, at least, I can answer for Hugh Cawton as I could for myself."

"Yes, I know," broke out Mark, with a touch of irrepressible bitterness; "he has secured confidence that I could never win."

"Then the fault was your own," said the old man, sternly; "as I valued an honest heart, I liked a fearless tongue. If I had not been determined to shut out all doubt concerning you, Mark, there were many times when I should have distrusted your lavish professions and cringing anxiety to please. I felt that if I had been disposed to tyrannize in my position, you would have borne it; that was not like a Cawton. Even your father, from what I know of him, would not have cringed to others for the sake of any advantages which it might bring."

Mark did not raise his eyes, but commenced a fierce attack upon his nails, savage in his impotence at not being able to resent the home-thrusts thus dealt at him.

His uncle resumed: "To think of you, in your richer prospects, grudging to poor Hugh even the chance of an opening in life—the mere opportunity to earn his bread—knowing, as you did, the straitened circumstances of his family, and the difficulties in his way. Then to mislead him into the belief that you were his friend, even while you were secretly betraying him to his ruin—the work of a very Judas. Shame, Mark! my dead sister's son as you are, I can hardly bring myself to forgive you, even for your mother's sake!" and the gray eyes glowed under their bent brows, full of indignant fire.

The listener still kept his head down, as if he hoped thus to shelter himself from that torrent of impassioned words, which he did not attempt to arrest; he felt that silence was his safest refuge.

After a few moments the old merchant spoke again. "I gave you to understand that I should require an account of the missing check; what have you done with it?"

While his uncle spoke, Mark's fingers had been nervously fumbling with the clasp of a pocket-book, from which he now drew out a paper, and passed it silently into the old man's hand. It was the all-important check. He opened it with trembling hands, examined it carefully, then slowly refolded it, saying, "It is well that you have not destroyed it. Here, at least, I am willing to give you the benefit of a charitable thought, that you preserved this evidence of your guilt with some intention of eventually rendering justice, and doing what you could to repair that wrong to the innocent. I am anxious to believe this much in your favor, Mark. You will need to have something to help to redeem the past."

Again there was silence, Mark helplessly writhing under every word of that stern questioner, with a sort of despairing idea taking possession of him, that the terrible ordeal would never end. If he had been less absorbed in himself, he must have remarked a strange alteration in his uncle's face within the last few minutes. A dull, ashy paleness about the quivering lips, and heavy dropping of the eyelids; the breath also came in short, labored gasps. But the strong will was still powerful in the midst of the incomprehensible weakness, which was already sapping the root of that proud strength. Even in this foreshadowing of its decline, the vigorous mind ruled the body, and the fire of energy burned on—kept alive by the high spirit, and the quality of endurance and resistance, which gave the character its martial type.

He spoke again. "I have another question to ask, Mark, which I hope you will answer with equal sincerity. I find to my lasting sorrow and regret, that Hugh Cawton is not the only one whom you have wronged; for there is yet another victim whose life you have helped to darken, and that victim a weak, tender woman, loving you, no doubt, and trusting in you, as women will love and trust. I speak of the wife whom you were not man enough to acknowledge after you had married her. Mark Danson, whatever that girl may be, she must have justice at your hands. It is her right, and I will have it so."

The deep voice rose and fell, in his agitation, sweeping through the room like an angry gust of wind.

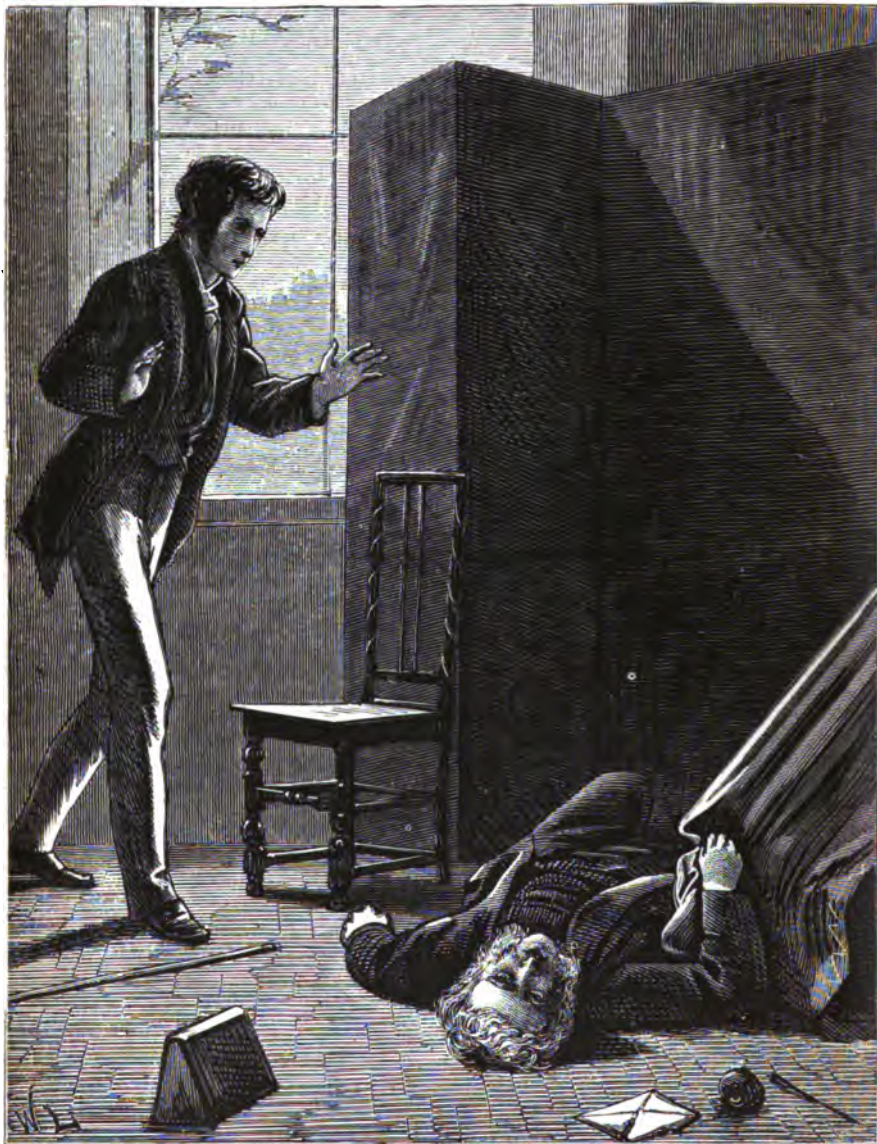
"And now for my question. You once led me to believe that you had a fancy for my ward, and I told you that I would rather see young May Rivers in her grave than wedded to one unworthy of her, who might prove traitor to his vows, and make her life a martyrdom. I spoke then little suspecting the truth as it concerned yourself. And you—knowing yourself the husband of another woman—how dared you think of May Rivers with the hope of winning her fresh girl's heart, when your love could be nothing but the vilest perjury? Answer me, Mark! Did you dare to carry things so far as to press your suit with May herself, acting upon the encouragement which I had unwittingly

given you? Answer me at once; and if you ever wish to obtain my forgiveness, do not prevaricate or trifle with the truth."

"Yes, I—I believe I did speak to her once on the subject; but she refused me. I took good care that she should."

No reply, except a few inarticulate sounds,

ing. Another moment, and before the startled nephew could interpose his arm to save him, Daniel Crawton had sunk down upon the carpet, and lay at the young man's feet, his broad chest heaving with the loud, labored breathing, and his eyes gazing upward, with a straining, troubled look, the memory of which Mark took with him



Stricken down at the very moment when he believed himself to be needed most.

which could not be framed into any thing like connected syllables. Mark looked up in surprise, in time to catch the ghastly hue of the old man's face, and see him stagger back, gasping for breath, and making convulsive clutches with his hands, as if to keep himself from fall-

ing. There he lay, stricken down at the very moment when he believed himself to be needed most—before any of his plans of reparation to the injured and innocent could be put into practice. Excitement and overwrought feeling had hastened the crisis, which had been



creeping on for weeks. The nerves, strung to the highest degree of tension, had given way at last, and the once stalwart, muscular frame lay a dead weight upon the floor, passive and helpless as a child;—the man of action, energy, and will, laid suddenly prostrate by a stroke which had hung over him for days, though he knew it not.

To say that it was not a shock to Mark Dawson, would be to do him injustice; for if there was any being in the world whom he held in high esteem, almost amounting to reverence, it was his uncle, Daniel Crawton. But even at that moment came the alloy of selfish thoughts. He did not lose sight of his position for an instant; his mind gathered in at one sweep all the exigencies of the situation, and the probable issue of events, in their influence upon his own fate. In the midst of all, he could not repress a certain feeling of satisfaction that the absence of Hugh Crawton and the clerk left him in sole possession of the field. "Who can tell what may follow?" he summed up, mentally; "my prospects may be safe yet; for whatever plans he may have formed concerning Hugh and myself, he had not had time to act upon them; and that rascally Royton may find that he has overshot his mark. Even if the governor recovers, he will be laid by for weeks at Broombank, and in the mean time I am master at the office. That pitiful old babbler shall feel my power."

His first active movement was to rush to the bell, and ring it with almost frantic violence; his next to go back to the old man's side, and bend over the prostrate body, trying to raise the head upon his arm, while that mad peal from the bell was still quivering through the house; and on the stairs were heard the hurried feet of bewildered waiters crowding up stairs to answer it, with a vague notion that they were about to witness some tragic scene.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### MAY'S HERO.

CHARLES RIVERS was doing the honors of his painting-room in his own agreeable manner; his picture had been duly criticised and admired, and he glanced round upon a very happy looking group, of which Aunt Lydia made one. A very dignified old lady, a little prim and stiff with her old-fashioned courtesy of a by-gone age, but unmistakably kind-looking, and unaffectedly glad to see the visitors whom (contrary to expectation) she had come down there to assist in welcoming, with the benevolent wish to make them feel more at home while they staid. She seemed to have taken Margaret Crawton under her special patronage. The young lady had unconsciously won her favor, by the respectful attention with which she listened to her own particular observations, and what appeared to her the very practical turn of her mind, for she seemed

to hold some very sensible opinions, and expressed them with great modesty. The result of this happy combination of merit was that Aunt Lydia rapidly made up her mind about Daniel Crawton's niece, to the effect that she would make an excellent wife for Charles, and be a very suitable and agreeable friend for her darling May; which last privilege was the most conclusive proof which Aunt Lydia could have given of her good opinion.

They were talking together, the old lady monopolizing more than her share of the dialogue, as she liked to do, except in the presence of certain people whom she held in awe. Charles, standing by Margaret's side, occasionally dropping in a word, but quite content to have assigned to him the position of a listener, happy in the simple fact of her presence, and disposed to encourage pleasant prophetic visions of certain bright mornings in a time to come—not far distant now, he hoped—when it would be his right to have that loved face always near him, shedding its light upon him and his labors. Thus three of the party, unconsciously and without design, had drawn themselves into a group apart. Hugh Crawton and May Rivers being thrown upon their own resources for entertainment, and left to drift together into conversation—an astonishing oversight on the part of Aunt Lydia.

They were at the other side of the room, standing by a table filled with folios of drawings. One of the artist's sketch-books was open between them, and May's little hand occasionally fluttered over the margin of a leaf, as she indicated some beauty in the drawing, effectually distracting the visitor's attention from that which she was so anxious for him to admire. To be thus verging towards friendship with May Rivers, admitted to the coveted privilege of sometimes seeing her in her home-life, was a novel position for Hugh Crawton—novel and exciting, after the strange repressed life with which, unknown to herself, the bewitching, brown-eyed creature at his side had been so closely linked; that inner life, which even a mother's penetration had not unveiled, with its wild dreams and wilder fancies, and the fitful throbbings of passionate feeling, which he had so resolutely tried to live down in the increasing hopelessness of his conviction that May Rivers could never be any thing to him. He recalled their first meeting in the Academy, a day which his memory had always checked off to brood over; then, that next chance sight of her on the morning when he made his unsuccessful search for work at the stone-yard, when his heart was heavy with despair, and life seemed at its hardest and dreariest. He remembered the trim phaeton, with the sleek, high-stepping ponies, and the bright face and gracious smile which had flashed such sunlight on him, leaving all so dull and gray when it was gone. He wondered if she recollected that time; but it was not likely she would have wasted so much thought about a stranger, as he was then to her. And now to

## UNDER FOOT.

batting together and exchanging com-  
d opinions! it was so new and bewil-  
ke treading a charmed pathway through  
y paradise, which his dreams had be-  
dimly shadowed out as something afar  
rer unapproachable for him. But in the  
the happiness which for the time was

struck a blow to some feeling which was grow-  
ing into love on her side? He was torturing  
himself with these questions, his eyes earnestly  
fixed upon the sketch under view, as though he  
were giving it intense study, when the silvery  
ring of May's voice roused him from his ab-  
straction.



An astonishing oversight on the part of Aunt Lydia.

ing his friend's painting-room into  
radiant place, Hugh was strangely  
by some words of his sister concern-  
k Danson and his intentions. Was it  
that May Rivers had ever liked his  
and had the discovery of his marriage

"I don't know whether you agree with me,  
Mr. Crawton; but setting aside the grand fore-  
ign scenery which artists and tourists are so  
fond of studying, there is nothing sweeter to me  
than a bit of English landscape."

"Yes," struck in Charles, who had just join-

ed them unperceived, and now thrust his laughing face over May's shoulder; "for all her Indian birth, my little sister is thoroughly English in her sympathies, and clings to the mother country like ivy round an old church tower."

"And I am not ashamed of the clinging, Charles."

"Nor I, for I love the old land equally with yourself. Ah, I should have thought of this before! We must enlist your eloquence on our side, May; try if you can not induce Mr. Hugh Crawton to relinquish a certain roving fancy, which has taken possession of him, and cost us all much trouble, for we are anxious to persuade him to give fortune in his native land one more trial before he gives it up for the new and unknown."

The young lady looked inquiringly at her brother, and Hugh flashed an appealing glance at the speaker, which was not without a touch of reproach; but it did not prevent Charles from dashing on with his explanation to May.

"Ah, I remember now, you do not know that Mr. Crawton has made up his mind to throw us all over and go out to Australia."

"To Australia!" she repeated, visibly taken by surprise.

At that moment Charles was called by Aunt Lydia, and he hurried away, saying laughingly to his sister, "Try what your eloquence can do."

He had made it embarrassing for both. That was, perhaps, the reason why her color varied with such pretty uncertainty, and she pouted her red lip with something of displeasure at Charles. It was so inconsiderate of him, taking things for granted in that free-and-easy way before his friend, as if it could be presumed that she had any influence upon Mr. Hugh Crawton's decisions. And the young man, on his side, was wondering if it were possible that Charles could suspect the true nature of his own feelings towards his sister. As he could not recollect any want of discretion in himself with regard to the safe keeping of his secret, he decided that it was not possible, and his friend had no motive for that random speech; so he tried to make the best of the position by saying, with a quiet smile—

"I feel sure that Miss Rivers will not charge me with infidelity to my native land, simply because I am willing to avail myself of a chance of pushing my way in another."

Her reply took rather the form of a leading question.

"Then your interests oblige you to go?"

"Yes, I think so. My place, and that of many others, can be well spared here among the busy workers. It will only help to thin the ranks; and, for myself, I am one who will not be missed outside of my own home."

She could not guess what gave that touch of sadness to the deep voice, nor interpret the meaning of the rapid glance which the dark eyes suddenly flashed at her face. She could not guess it, nor understand what made her own heart thrill. She let the shy lids droop over her eyes,

and was perhaps relieved that there was no further chance of continuing the conversation, for Aunt Lydia suddenly made the discovery that it was time for luncheon, and Margaret came across the room to look at the sketches which seemed to have yielded her brother such absorbing interest.

May was glad of the interruption, but she would not have liked to confess that the visitors of the morning had taken with them much of her serenity of mind. Many times during the day she found herself pondering upon the news of Hugh Crawton's departure from England. Was it that her girl's fancy had found at last a hero for her secret thoughts to crown with laurel, and had one of the great waves of life rolled to her feet laden with that mystery which makes the passion and poetry, the purpose, happiness, and oftentimes the sorrow, of woman's life?

Poor Aunt Lydia! not all her simple arts combined, would avail to keep her darling any longer a child. By the onward law of progressive being, in spite of herself, and without any conscious effort of her own, May had sought and met her woman's destiny, and the young heart was no longer its own keeper.

## CHAPTER LIV.

SENT FOR.

THERE was great excitement and dismay at Broombank when its stricken master was brought home and lay as one dead, attended by the eminent physician, who had never quitted his patient since first summoned by the nephew, who displayed the deepest anxiety and concern about his uncle. There was also Dr. Grimes, who had come hurriedly on first hearing the news of his old friend's seizure at the hotel in London. There was unmistakable sorrow among the servants, who moved about with noiseless steps, sometimes holding council together in subdued whispers filled with gloomy foreboding of the future. Though a stern master, Daniel Crawton had always been liberal and just; there was not one among them who did not hold him in high respect.

"He knows our ways and we know his," spoke the grave-faced butler, sententially; "which is more than can be said for them that'll come after him—more's the pity. There'll be changes right and left when the new master takes his place, and not for the best, we may be sure. I'm thinking we shall all find the situation won't be worth much when somebody else rules at Broombank, and it's not often I'm mistaken."

The oracle having thus spoken, jerked his hand over his shoulder to give point to his words, and made a peculiar grimace to give his auditors an idea of the individuality of the "somebody else" referred to.

Quiet Mrs. Crane went through her numerous duties as usual, self-restrained and helpful

—qualities which made her an acquisition on all trying occasions, and especially made her an invaluable nurse.

Mark Danson was officious and demonstrative in his solicitude, hovering about the sick-room with unwearied persistence, receiving every additional medical report with an accession of keen anxiety. When night drew on bringing no perceptible change in the condition of the patient, the apparently devoted nephew was at his post with a watchfulness that never seemed to relax. Dr. Grimes and the physician relieved each other by turns, and the latter gentleman was so impressed by the attention of Mark that he took occasion to comment upon it to his companion.

"A highly commendable sort of young man, quite an example. Shows so much respect and proper feeling for his uncle."

It chanced that Mrs. Crane overheard some of these whispered remarks, and the effect produced upon her was somewhat singular, bringing a curious look into the usually still, almost expressionless face. If any one who understood her had been observing her closely, they might have remarked a guarded expression of reserve whenever Mark addressed her, something that implied distrust and a sense of being on the watch against him. He felt this, and resented it in his own way, making a silent mental note of it. "She does not know that her days at Broombank will be numbered if he dies. I will have no prying old woman about me when I am master here."

The morning was far advanced. He had retired to the library after his almost untasted breakfast; there he shut himself up to write some important business letters which could not be delayed, also a letter of instructions to the cashier and managing clerk, by which he prepared for his own absence from the office as well as his uncle's, deciding that he would not leave Broombank, at least for that day. Did he attempt to explain to himself the real motive of his reluctance to leave the vicinity of the sick-room? Could it be that he thought the preservation of his own interests required him to keep guard there? He had finished his correspondence, and had his hand on the bell to summon the servant, when, after a preliminary knock at the door, it was opened from the outside, and Mrs. Crane made her appearance with a note in her hand. Mark started when he saw her, saying anxiously, "Any fresh news, Mrs. Crane?"

"Yes, and I am glad to say for the better. He was conscious before he went to sleep, and has spoken within the last hour."

The young man sprang to his feet; but Mrs. Crane raised her hand with a warning gesture, meant to restrain further demonstration.

"The doctors order perfect quiet; he is to see no one; they will not answer for the effect of any excitement now."

"Certainly, Mrs. Crane; but you should be aware that prohibition does not include me. It

can not be supposed that there is any danger of my forgetting what my uncle's condition requires."

He made the pronoun unpleasantly emphatic, and spoke with something of haughtiness in his tone. Mrs. Crane listened quietly, not attempting to palliate her words, but leaving him to interpret them in whatever sense he pleased. She was generally self-possessed, and, like many quiet people, possessed a strong reserve force of silent, persistent firmness, which generally carried its point, and served her well in all trying situations.

Failing to impress her in the way he intended, Mark glanced inquiringly at the note in her hand. He would not condescend to ask for information, but waited for her to speak.

"Your Cousin Hugh is to be sent for, Mr. Mark; your uncle has asked for him, and—"

"Sent for! Impossible!" he interrupted, excitedly. "Have you not just now said that he is to be kept quiet, and see no one?"

"Yes, but this must be made an exception; he seems set upon it, and to cross him might produce worse results, and be even more dangerous than—"

Again she was interrupted. "Nothing of the kind, I assure you, Mrs. Crane; any excitement will be injurious, the thing to be most avoided in the present stage of his illness. It is madness to think of exposing him to the shock of such an interview—like hastening his end. I should always reproach myself if I agreed to it in any way. No, my cousin must not be sent for."

There was not a ruffle of agitation in Mrs. Crane's quiet face. She waited patiently until he had said his say, then answered—

"It seems to me that we ought to allow the doctors to judge for us in this instance. If they are to be trusted with the case they have an undoubted right to decide which is best for their patient."

"Yes, but only within certain limits, Mrs. Crane," Mark argued with strange earnestness. "With all proper respect for the profession, my opinion is that medical gentlemen, like the rest of us, are liable to mislead both themselves and others. There is such a thing as weakly yielding to the importunity of a patient. Now, Dr. Grimes is little better than a pottering old woman, and being a personal friend of my uncle's, would be more likely to give way to his wishes. I think it's a pity that he should be here at all."

Mrs. Crane held her own opinion on the subject; but she coughed it down. He went on:

"It is natural that I should be anxious about my uncle in his present critical state. If my advice could have any weight, I should certainly use it against Hugh Cawton being sent for, at least for the present," he added, with another interrogative glance at the letter in her hand.

"The doctors think differently, Mr. Mark. They have decided, very wisely, I think, not to cross the patient's wish. Dr. Grimes has writ-

ten this note urging your cousin to come without delay."

"Are you sure that it is with the approval of Doctor Marshall?" queried Mark, dubiously.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Crane, with emphasis, at the same time giving him a direct, steady look.

He shrugged his shoulders, saying, "Ah! well, then, in that case, nothing remains for me but to defer to their judgment, and trust that they may not be trying a rash experiment with their patient. Of course, I can have no interest or desire to thwart my uncle's wishes, except what arises from my solicitude about himself."

"Will you see that this note is forwarded, Mr. Mark?"

"Yes, at once. I am making up a packet of letters for post, and it can go with them. It will be received some time this afternoon."

She handed it to him without further comment. He took it, and not even glancing at the superscription on the envelope, placed it on the table. It had been his intention to dispatch the packet to post in the usual way, but after Mrs. Crane left the room it suddenly occurred to him that his letters that day were too important to be intrusted to a servant's hands, so he decided to take upon himself the task of posting them.

Mrs. Crane was a cautious woman, and a far-seeing one. She walked back to the sick-room in a reverie. Dr. Grimes met her on the threshold, a grave look on his face, and his finger raised warningly to his lips, as he said, in a whisper—

"He is dozing now, but he has been awake, again asking for his nephew Hugh. He speaks of nothing else. It seems a heavy trouble on his mind. I wish the young man could come at once. I think it would help to compose him."

Mrs. Crane thought a moment before she spoke. "Your letter will not reach him till this afternoon, then there is the delay and uncertainty of the trains. There is only one thing that can be done, which is for Thompson to drive over and bring back Mr. Hugh, taking with him a note from you—if you will trouble to write a second—to provide against the other not arriving in time."

"An excellent plan," said the old doctor, admiringly. "I wonder we did not think of it before."

So it was arranged, and, thanks to Mrs. Crane, acted upon so promptly that the Broombank brougham had passed through the gate, and was rolling swiftly down the green, hedge-skirted lane on its way to town, before Mark Danson returned from the village and became aware of its errand, and the sudden change of plan. When alone in the library, he brought his clenched hand down on the table with a crash that was nearly fatal to the elegant glass inkstand, muttering—

"He will come, then—no fear but he will come! I know it is that woman's doing."

It was a wise proceeding on the part of that prudent manager, Mrs. Crane, as she would herself have been convinced, if she could have known the truth concerning the note which she had confided to Mark: that, instead of being posted with the rest of his letters, it was at that moment reposing in his pocket-book.

He who could deliberately forge another man's signature, do his best to break by slow degrees a loving woman's heart, and systematically deceive the one who had been his benefactor from boyhood, could not be expected to be restrained by many nice scruples of honor concerning the interception of a letter, when its detention served his purpose.

## CHAPTER LV.

### USING HIS POWER.

MARK DANSON was weary of sitting inactive in the library, with nothing better to do than brooding over coming events, and watching for the return of the brougham that was to bring Hugh Cawton to the bedside of his uncle. He did not venture another visit to the sick-room after Mrs. Crane left him, but sat at the window with folded arms, gazing moodily out upon the trimly-kept sweep of lawn, that looked like a velvet carpet before the house. He did not disguise from himself that he was uneasy at the prospect of his cousin's coming. If it could only be possible to overtake the man Thompson, and after bribing him to compliance with his wishes, invent some clever stratagem to intercept his errand, and thus leave the old merchant to infer that his nephew was resentful for past injustice, and refused to come at his bidding. It was a bold step to think of, and if he tried it and failed, that would be worse than all, for it would sink him lower than ever in his uncle's regard. Then he had great doubt that any bribe would be able to corrupt the fidelity of the servant towards his old master; and even if he undertook the risk, and managed the thing successfully, there were a hundred chances to one but that woman Crane would in some way ferret out the mystery. "Still waters run deep." He believed that he particularly disliked and distrusted quiet women. After all, he decided that it was not worth the venture; he was growing tired of endless scheming and the mental fever of fear and anxiety which it brought. Let him come; perhaps it would be his best policy to let events take their course. His interests were safe so long as the old man had no thought of altering his will, which he knew had secured him all that he desired—the wealth and position which he valued above all else.

In the midst of these musings it occurred to him that he would have time to make a visit to the city before Hugh Cawton could arrive at Broombank, thus securing for himself the opportunity of speaking his mind to Giles Royton, and putting into execution a purpose which he had formed—a purpose of revenge against Elea-

nor's father, for what he called his confounded meddling with other people's business, and the spiteful use which he had made of the knowledge gained by his prying. As Mark was well aware, he could act the master in the counting-house during the absence of the principal.

While Daniel Cawton lay in his darkened chamber, shut out from the active business world where he had held his own with such a powerful hand, the sway which he was unable to exercise devolved upon his nephew, his partner and representative for the time. Mark had resolved that the first use which he made of his new power should be to discharge Giles Royton from his situation, and to do it at once, while it was impossible for the clerk to make any appeal against the decision that would send him out upon the world, in his declining years, without the means of living. That would be a blow of retaliation upon Eleanor for her obstinacy and rashness. Why could she not have waited?

Acting upon his suddenly formed resolution, Mark rang for some luncheon to be served immediately, forced himself to eat a little, then hastily left the house, rather glad to escape the anticipated infliction of a tête-à-tête dinner with Dr. Grimes, against whom he still cherished resentment, and whom he would have been much pleased to release from his attendance in the sick-room. He would have been disturbed by other thoughts and apprehensions, if he could have seen one of the passengers, who was leaning composedly back in a compartment of one of the carriages in the down train that flashed past him—a sedate, gentlemanly figure, in whom he would have recognized at once his uncle's solicitor, Mr. Bennett, who, with his confidential clerk, was hurrying to Broombank, in obedience to the urgent summons which he had received. If Mark had only caught one passing glimpse of that grave face, what a blow it would have dealt to his hopes of the future, and how materially it would have changed his thoughts and plans that day! But he did not. Unseen and unthought of, the man of law crossed him on his way, and the two thus unconsciously went speeding on to the fulfillment of their respective errands.

The news of Daniel Cawton's illness had excited great consternation among his clerks in the city. Many grave looks and a subdued murmur of inquiry met Mark Danson on his entrance. One glance told him that Giles Royton was at his desk as usual. He noticed the dropping of his pen, and saw him lean forward with an expression of keen anxiety on his face, to hear his answer to the questions about his uncle. Mark strode on to the private office, where there were letters to be looked over, and certain business transactions to attend to, which kept him employed for some little time. As soon as he was at liberty, he rang the bell and gave a somewhat peremptory order for Mr. Royton to come to him.

"Mind, Richard, he is to leave whatever he is doing, and attend to me at once; I am waiting."

"Yes, sir."

A few moments, and he was again face to face with his wife's father. Not a word was spoken for several seconds, during which they stood regarding each other with lowering looks, both instinctively feeling the necessity of being upon the defensive. It was now open hostility, with every pretext of disguise torn down between them. Mark Danson was the first to speak. His words had an aggressive tone that, under the circumstances, was particularly offensive to the clerk, and called up a dull glow of heat into his pale face. "I need not ask if you have published to your friends that interesting fact of our relationship; for there is little doubt but you would edify them with full particulars thereof."

"It is no longer a secret, as you know," replied Royton, significantly; "but in one thing you are mistaken," he added, proudly. "I would not anger myself by talking about it any more than I could help; for, as I told you once before, I am not proud of the connection. I have no reason to be; it was the darkest day in my Nelly's life when she first met you."

"And in mine," struck in Mark, bitterly; "it has cost me endless trouble and anxiety to keep that wretched marriage out of sight."

"And you would have let your Cousin Hugh have gone to his ruin without mercy; you would have shown none to him or his family."

"How do you know that?" demanded Mark, fiercely. "It would not have been ruin if he had emigrated, and made his fortune in another country, away from this overcrowded place, where counting-house clerks are as plentiful as blackberries, and it is little better than gentlemanly beggary. I tell you it would not have been ruin for him. You doubt me, man—I read it in your face; but it is true for all that—there, at least, I was not deceiving Hugh; a lucrative situation would have been ready for him when he landed, and through my influence. But enough of this; I did not send for you to engage in a war of useless words, only to tell you that from this day you may consider yourself under notice of dismissal, which will end on this day month."

"Dismissal!" gasped the clerk, with dilating eyes.

"Yes; I think I spoke distinctly enough; after that date we shall not require your services."

Giles Royton's face worked as he said, slowly, "I know why you have done this."

"Possibly you may, to your sorrow, perhaps, when you find yourself pushed to the wall by younger and stronger men. I tell you that there are scores of old, worn-out fellows like yourself, a drag upon the labor market; but, whatever happens, remember that it is your daughter's work. She lost sight of your interest, as well as her own, when she urged you to turn informer. I know it is her work," he continued, passionately; "you would never have done it of yourself."



"You are right. All the good that I have done in my life has been Nelly's doing, God bless her! It was nothing but my duty; and, if the time were to come over again, I hope I should have strength given me to do it all the same, and never sell my conscience for the sake of a situation; but," he added, as if the question had suddenly flashed upon his mind, "does my master, Daniel Crawton, know any thing of this?"

"I do not hold myself bound to enter into explanations with you," said Mark, haughtily. "You should not need to be told, after all these years, that my uncle's interests and mine are identical, and that I represent him in his absence. In his name I give your notice of dismissal."

"Which I take in my own," replied the other, quietly. "I am not ashamed of having done my duty."

Mark rang the bell with some irritability, and turned his back upon the speaker as a hint that their interview was to end there. Glancing askance at the discharged clerk, he saw him walk out of the office, holding his head a little higher than usual.

The junior partner went back to Broombank, exulting in having done what he wished, and used his power before any thing occurred to wrest it from his hand.

And what of poor Giles Royton, who had to keep up appearances before his fellow-clerks with such a forced strain upon his spirits all that day? The brave, outward cheerfulness was nearly all gone when he reached home in the evening. He almost tottered into the room where his daughter Eleanor sat sewing, and, putting his hands upon her shoulders, abruptly announced his news. "He, Mark Danson, has done it, Nelly, as I might have expected he would, if the chance was ever given him; but, in spite of what he says, I can't think that the old master has any hand in it."

"What has he done, father?" questioned Eleanor, with blanched cheeks.

In reply, Giles Royton gave the news of Daniel Crawton's illness, saying, in conclusion, "And his nephew has made it the opportunity to give me notice of dismissal. I am to leave this day month, and what is to become of us after that, Heaven only knows. You are his wife, and can force a provision from him, child; but I would not have you touch a shilling of his money."

Then Eleanor took upon herself the office of comforter, with the high moral courage which had always been such a sure spar of trust for the father's weakness to cling to. Her face glowed, and her eyes lit with a light which he had not seen in them for days.

"You can guess why he has done it, Nelly."

"Yes, father; but never mind, you did what was right; better any kind of hardship, than for you to keep your place at the price of wrong to another. Things may not be so bad with us after all. I am getting stronger, and with

God's blessing I can turn to work as in the old days. Even this cloud that seems so dark may have light behind it; for if the worst comes, father, I have a feeling that we shall not be left without our daily bread."

## CHAPTER LVI.

### UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

It was done, the important task which Daniel Crawton had set himself, believing it one of the most pressing duties which remained for him to do on this side of the grave. He had altered his will, making what he now felt to be a more equitable division of his property. What right had Mark Danson to be enriched at the expense of other members of his family, equally near to him, and bearing the Crawton name? It had been nothing less than injustice to set aside their claims, and let his own quarrel with the father mar the interests of the unoffending children. Did it not seem like retribution that the seed which he had sown in blind reliance upon his own foresight and wisdom should bear such fruit? He had reaped the bitter harvest, and time was given him to make some reparation so far as concerned the future. The past he could only regret, for it enfolded a story which troubled him to dwell upon, of a cloud of poverty which had gloomed dense and dark over the destinies of an unfortunate household, while he was winning the prizes of life, banking, investing, and massing his wealth. He did not like to think of all that toil, struggle, and silent endurance of ills which he had done so little to alleviate. Those were the thoughts which the stricken old man put from him with a long, quivering sigh during the hours of that sunny morning, when he lay waking and watching, all the returning power of his mind concentrated upon two fixed ideas—the coming of Hugh Crawton and the altering of his will.

The first arrival was that of the solicitor, a thoroughly conscientious man, and worthy of the confidence which his client reposed in him. He did what was required of him with his usual promptness, and without comment, seeking no explanation beyond what was conveyed in the instructions which he received, and treating the whole matter as one of the changes and eccentricities to which he was accustomed from wealthy old clients in the final important act of their lives—the disposal of their effects. Like Dr. Marshall, the legal gentleman had too much business upon his hands to admit of him lingering long after he had fulfilled the errand which brought him to Broombank. Only allowing himself a few minutes' gossip in the library with Dr. Grimes, who was an old acquaintance, Mr. Bennett hurried away, to the intense disgust of his clerk, who had become favorably impressed with the friendliness of the butler, and was much disappointed in his hope of a longer holiday.

The pair were far on their way back to town

before Mark Danson returned. As Mark came in sight of the house, he was just in time to catch the retreating shadow of Mr. Poynts moving in an opposite direction. He was the rector of the village church, an intimate friend of his uncle's and a frequent visitor at Broombank.

What more natural than for him to be often there, particularly during the old man's illness! So Mark argued to himself, in contradiction of the involuntary misgiving which arose in his mind at the moment. He could not tell why, at such a time, he should recall the fact that, several years ago, when his uncle had occasion to add a codicil to his will, this Mr. Poynts had been one of the witnesses; but what possible association of ideas could connect that circumstance with the clergyman's present visit? Mark took himself to task for his folly, and went on twirling his elegantly-mounted cane in his hand, and angrily switching off the petals of some flowers as he passed. Anxious to ascertain if his cousin had arrived during his absence, he invented an errand for Thompson, sent for him, and was told that the man was still out with the carriage. This conveyed the information he sought, for he guessed then that Hugh Crawton had not come.

"I suppose there have been no visitors to-day," he remarked to the butler in an apparently careless tone.

"No, sir, only Mr. Poynts, who has just gone, and Mr. Bennett, the lawyer, who went before him."

Mark started, the last unexpected announcement came upon him like a shock. He was standing on the hearth-rug and the butler was looking at him. Becoming suddenly aware of this, and dreading the amount of inquisitive speculation that would be excited among the servants if he allowed his agitation to appear too visibly upon the surface, Mark made an effort to master himself, and turned his ghastly face to the fire-place, saying with as much indifference as he could assume—

"Oh, indeed. Very well, Johnson; you can go now. I don't think Thompson will be long before he returns."

And Johnson, the oracular, went at his bidding, making his own version about the queer looks of the young master, who, as he expressed it, "seemed quite doubled up at his mention of the lawyer."

As the door closed upon the servant, Mark dropped into the nearest chair, and resting his head on his hands, remained for some time brooding over this new feature in his affairs with a hopeless feeling of defeat upon him. It was done, then—all that he had most dreaded and studied to prevent. There could be only one purpose for the visit of Lawyer Bennett, and even upon the brink of the grave the old man had revived to deal out to him his punishment. What use for him to contend further? He had been playing fast and loose with fortune, and the final chances of the day were against him. What matter now whether Hugh Crawton came

to Broombank or not? and what would it avail him to try to keep them apart? the whole family of the Crawtons might take their places beside that sick-bed if they pleased: it was nothing to him, now that his promised inheritance had been signed away, and for anything that he could tell the future that awaited him would be little removed from beggary. While thus thinking he heard the grating of wheels upon the gravel outside; but he did not look up, or rouse himself from that drooping, despairing attitude, though he guessed that the sound heralded the arrival of his Cousin Hugh.

The sunlight had shifted from the window of the sick-room, and lines of cool gray shadows were falling across the floor, softly marking the day's decline. The favorable symptoms of the patient still continued: but as Dr. Grimes had feared, the interview with the lawyer had overtasked his powers. As the day wore on he showed signs of exhaustion, and his voice was very feeble and broken as he now and then questioned Mrs. Crane about the hour. Each time he received his answer with a fretful sigh, "Would he never come?" At last there was a sound of wheels, and presently a quiet ring at the hall door-bell penetrated to the ears of the listeners in the sick-chamber.

"The carriage at last," murmured the invalid, with a sudden lighting of his face; "it is Hugh Crawton; I know he is come, bring him to me at once."

Dr. Grimes came to the foot of the bed, and looked up at the patient with a serious face, which expressed what he felt, the fear that all this excitement would be too much for one day. The old man saw the look, and understood it, for he roused himself to answer, with feverish eagerness, something of the old imperious will flashing out for an instant from his eyes, "Don't try to cross my wish, doctor. I know what is best in this case. I must see my nephew now, and I will have no nay."

So they let him come. At a sign from the doctor Mrs. Crane slipped quietly out of the room, and Daniel Crawton watched the door with an intensely expectant look, murmuring, "Thank Heaven! the task is finished before he comes or can know any thing of it! You understand me, old friend," he added, addressing the doctor with a tone of appeal which he had used before with reference to the same subject. "My nephew Hugh knows nothing of my change of intentions in his favor; and no one can blame him by a single word. Here he comes, that is his step. You will leave us together, doctor, you and Mrs. Crane. I have much to say to the lad."

"Yes, certainly, Mr. Crawton; but really this excitement is very bad. I am afraid Dr. Marshall—"

He was interrupted. "Be afraid of nothing, doctor. I promise to remember all your cautions, only leave us together."

Both for uncle and nephew there was something touching and sad in that meeting, partic-



nlarly for Hugh, thus unexpectedly brought, for the first time in his life, under the roof of his father's wealthy brother, with the stricken master of the stately mansion lying there in that helplessness which seemed so strange in association with him. The young man had not yet recovered from the shock which Doctor Grimes's

conscious happiness, while his uncle was lying there. But for that delay he would have arrived hours earlier. For some minutes his heart was too full to speak. He could only lean over the bed and inclose the outstretched hand in his clinging clasp, with a reverent lifting up of his heart, in thankfulness that his innocence had



There was something touching and sad in that meeting.

note had given him. He was out with his sister when the stopping of the Broombank carriage at his father's door threw the little household into such perturbation. Looking back now on the bright morning spent with May Rivers, he could not help reproaching himself for his un-

been made known before this stroke had fallen on the old man.

The sufferer was the first to break that silence, which was perhaps more expressive than words could have been. "Thanks, Hugh; I knew you would come—that you, at least, would not let

any memory of injustice and injury in the past come between us now. Yet I was harsh to you, Hugh; for I cast you out without mercy; there has been little favor shown to you or yours."

"Oh, uncle! do not talk like this," spoke Hugh, with a choking sob in his voice, and still clasping the wrinkled hand in his.

"It is true, boy; I have been to blame through all. I had too much dependence upon myself and my own wisdom. I know now where I fell short of the high standards of good which I set up for others. On the border of the dark valley, Hugh, the veil falls away from our eyes, and we see every thing so clearly. It is fit now, when all else have failed me, that I should have none to turn to or trust in at the last but you. Shall I confess it, boy? you are near to my heart; you have been always from the night that first brought us together."

Hugh's breast heaved, and he bent his head to hide the agitation in his face as he whispered, "And I never to guess it, uncle, all the time that I was striving ever so hard to win your esteem."

"With what motive?" asked the sick man, with a strange look of earnest interest in the answer.

"That I might be able to wipe out any offense that my father may have given you in the past—perhaps even to make up that long estrangement which has been such a grief to my mother. And—and it was my ambition to tread in your steps, to make my way as you had made yours, and achieve for myself fortune and position as you had achieved them."

Daniel Crawton sighed, and his fingers clung yearningly to the warm young hands that were pressing his as though they would infuse some of their own vigorous life into his failing one. His voice shook as he said, "Just the answer I might have expected from one in whom I have often fancied a likeness to myself; but you must not choose the same path, Hugh; it is too bleak and bare and hard for you to tread. From my own experience, I tell you it must never be the same lonely life for you, my boy; not the same empty heart when you grow old. You must love and marry—for a good woman's love is the truest help and influence that a man can have about him in his early struggles, and the best armor for him to wear through his life. You look at me with wonder, Hugh; I will whisper a secret which, perhaps, you have not guessed. I loved your mother in the by-gone days. It was not her fault that she could not return my love and bless my life as she has blessed my brother's. No fault of hers that I had to stand aside and become soured and hard and worldly. No fault of hers, God bless her! There, Hugh, in those few words you have the story of my life, except for the addition, which I make now, that the empty place is filled at last, and what I have left of affection I give to her only son if he will take it, and like the stern old man a little for himself."

"Dear uncle."

That was all Hugh could say from his full heart, but his lips pressed a reverent kiss upon that other helpless hand which lay out over the coverlet: and thus was confirmed between them the subtle bond of that strong kinship of nature which had always seemed to draw them together. After that the old man lay for a while silent from exhaustion. At his request, Hugh gave him a drink; then he seemed to revive, and began again: "Don't be uneasy, Hugh. I see you will be as bad as Dr. Grimes; but I promise to rest presently. First, there is something I want to say. Ah, now I remember: it was about your emigration to Australia. I heard that it was your intention to go out there."

"Yes, uncle, it was."

"But not now, Hugh; I trust that is all over."

"Over for the present."

"Not merely for the present," interrupted the old man, earnestly: "you must give up that idea, Hugh; your duty lies here, in the old land. You must never leave it, my boy; the folks at home will need you more and more as the years go on; and the firm of Crawton and Co. will need you. There will be the old name to keep up. Promise that you will do all this for my sake!"

And Hugh, in a voice broken by emotion, gave the required promise, full of wonder at these words, which contained the first hint that had been given him of any intentions which his uncle might have formed in his favor.

At that moment Dr. Grimes, fearful and anxious for his patient, came back, and the talk between uncle and nephew ended for the time; but Daniel Crawton, with characteristic perversity, would not allow Hugh to leave him, but kept him by his bed-side, as though it soothed him to know that he was there.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### A SEARCH AND ITS RESULTS.

MARK DANSON locked himself in the library, where he passed the evening, with no other company than his own bitter thoughts. At the usual hour he had the supper-tray brought in, but sent it away with its contents nearly untouched, then turned the key again between himself and the outward world, and relapsed into his gloomy reverie—a keen, anxious study of his position from every point of view, brooding over what he considered his defeat.

Mark sat thus until all waking sounds were hushed, and the house buried in silence. The stable clock was striking twelve when he rose, gave himself a shake, as though he wished to have practical evidence that he was still awake with all his senses on the alert. He counted the strokes of the clock with mechanical precision, and looked curiously round the spacious room, which had no other light than that of the reading-lamp, which threw a circle of illumination about the table and the place where

he stood, leaving the rest of the room in partial shadow.

Within the last few minutes an idea had flashed upon his mind—a bold idea, which he was at first almost afraid to encourage, but which was now rapidly assuming definite form. He had conceived the design of obtaining for himself a sight of his uncle's will as it now stood, if it were possible to accomplish the thing by any means that insured safety and success, for he had a firmly-rooted conviction that certain alterations had been made materially affecting his own interests.

Only a few minutes did Mark pause to deliberate and take counsel with himself. He listened cautiously at the door to be sure that all was still in the house, then stole to the window which opened on the terrace, and commanded a fine view of the grounds. He thrust aside the heavy curtains, and with an odd mixture of irresolution, in the midst of his reckless desperation, stood some moments cooling his hot forehead against the window-glass and looking out. He designed that interval as breathing-time—a sort of preparation for what he was about to do.

At last he turned, dropped his hold of the curtain, and went slowly back to the table, with a curious set look about his lips; he had made up his mind how to act. Opening from the library was a secret closet, fitted with shelves and an iron safe, possibly intended as a repository for plate, family deeds, and valuable papers. This closet was so ingeniously contrived that its existence could not be suspected by the uninitiated; the door, forming a portion of the library shelves, fastened with a spring, and, when closed, defying detection from any but those acquainted with the secret. It was there that Daniel Crawton was accustomed to keep his will, a draft of which had been placed in the hands of his lawyer.

Towards this ingenious hiding-place Mark Danson now turned his attention; creeping across the floor with stealthy steps, now and then stopping to listen, and moving on again when his ears assured him that he had no interruption to fear. His fingers, familiar with the trick, were not long in finding the concealed spring; the door swung noiselessly back, disclosing, in place of the goodly show of learning in those impressive tomes and folios, an open space large enough for a man to stand upright.

He had retraced his steps for the lamp, and was returning with it in his hand, when a new source of perplexity occurred to him. He had not the key of the safe wherein the will was deposited. He reflected that, as the place must have been visited that day, Dr. Grimes might probably have the key in his custody, as he enjoyed a large share of Daniel Crawton's confidence, and was one of the witnesses to his will. But this gave him even less hope of securing its possession. There was no chance in that house, surrounded as it was by such a fence of safeguards and precautions—no chance, he repeated, bitterly, of being able even to manage the piracy

of a bunch of keys without discovery. What was to be done? Had he advanced thus far, to fail on the brink of success, when every thing else favored his purpose? After all, it was not one which he need be ashamed to own. He had no sinister designs upon that will, vexatious and unjust as it might prove to be against him—no intention of tampering with it in any way; only a wish to read for himself, and learn to what extent the old merchant had carried his resentment.

But all this reasoning did not advance him a step nearer to the gaining of his purpose. He hastily decided that to think of procuring the key from Dr. Grimes was quite out of the question. He had only one hope. It had been his practice to carry about with him certain duplicates of his uncle's private keys, which he had managed to get made for his own use. There was just a chance that one of these might do service in this instance, and procure for him access to the safe. He resolved to try. There was no other alternative now, except to give up his desire, which he could not be content to do. After a moment's hurried search through his pockets, he found what he required; but his hands, trembling with eagerness, bungled in their task; even in the act of sorting the keys for one likely to fit the lock which he was so anxious to open, he let them drop from his hold, falling on the floor with a sharp clang that sounded strangely in the midnight stillness, and to his startled apprehension seemed to be given back in a dozen betraying echoes. He picked up the keys, his hands shaking more than ever, and the dew of fear rising on his forehead, as he cast guilty glances over his shoulder towards the library, as though he feared to meet the stern gaze of Daniel Crawton suddenly confronting him, and to hear again that voice, ever so relentless against wrong-doing, denouncing his new treason.

"I am making an idiot of myself to-night," he whispered, his parched lips clinging together in his excitement as his hands groped nervously about the lock. At that moment there was a knocking at the library door. This unlooked-for interruption came upon him like a shock, for his nerves were partially unstrung by the agitation of the last few days. There was something almost superstitious in his confusion and dismay. He gave a violent start back, again dropping his keys. He was too much agitated and bewildered to remember any thing about the safety of the dangerous spirit-lamp, which he had carried in from the library and placed on a shelf near, the better to assist him in his search among the papers. He had lighted a wax taper, which, unfortunately for himself, he had then in his hand. His account of the accident was always confused, he could never explain exactly how it occurred, except that his arm must, in some way, have come in contact with the lamp. He heard a sudden noise like the snap of a pistol, then the shivering of glass as the broken lamp fell against him, sending over his dress a stream of the inflammable fluid, which, coming in contact with the lighted taper, became a fold

of flame, wrapping him in a fiery embrace; then, he was conscious of a quick smarting flash and pain in his eyes. After that, it was all darkness and agony, through which he distinctly heard still the knocking at the door, kept up in a succession of sharp, irregular raps. He had locked the door, thus by his own act cutting himself off from deliverance.

Now a new horror seized him. He fancied, from the suffocating oppression of the air, that the door of the closet had swung back to its place. If this was the truth, and the spring had closed, it would be impossible to open it from the inside, and there would be no hope of rescue; unknown to any one in the house, he would die his terrible death before help could reach him. He had, at one time, said to himself that the place could be made a living tomb: was it to be his own?

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### MARK'S DELIVERER.

HUGH CRAWTON readily yielded to his uncle's entreaty that he would remain at Broombank for the present, for his own wishes strongly seconded this arrangement as regarded himself. He wrote a hasty note, conveying to his mother an intimation of his intended stay, and a report of the old man's condition. After this, he resumed his seat at the bedside, quickly establishing himself in Dr. Grimes's good opinion, and allaying his fears for the welfare of his patient, by his unobtrusive, quiet manner, and the intelligent way in which he seemed to adapt himself to the requirements of the occasion.

It was past midnight when Daniel Crawton awoke from one of his frequent fitful slumbers, to find his nephew still patiently sitting beside him, reading the Bible. He studied the young man a few moments before he gave any sign that he was awake, taking in a gratified impression of the noble head, and the grave, bending face, with its finely-cut features and clearly-defined profile. He was already growing accustomed to that presence in his room, and the new feeling of content which it brought him.

"Hugh," he said, at last. The sound of his voice instantly secured an attentive and ready listener. "I want you to do me a little service. I have just remembered that I left a pocket-book on my reading-desk in the library, the last morning that I went to the city; as it contains papers of value, I should not like to have it lost: will you get it for me in the morning?"

"I will go down for it at once," said Hugh, promptly; and he went, trusting to chance to find his way in the strange house.

This was the errand which brought Hugh Crawton to the door of the library at the untimely hour when his knocking startled the wretched spy on the point of putting into execution his dishonorable design of tampering with the privacy of the safe—the apparently

trifling incident on which hung the salvation or sacrifice of a life, even then struggling with a terrible danger from which there seemed no hope of rescue.

Hugh felt surprised to find the door locked, also that his repeated knocking met with no attention. He knew that the room was occupied by his cousin, for early in the evening Dr. Grimes had mentioned in his hearing that Mark had locked himself in the library, and he had sacrificed his own reading rather than disturb him. Believing that the young man had fallen asleep, and really anxious as he was to regain the pocket-book for his uncle, Hugh crushed down the involuntary feeling which made him shrink from the prospect of a meeting with Mark, and redoubled his exertions, raining down on the door a shower of smart raps, which he considered clamorous enough to break in upon the dreams of any natural sleeper. Still no answer. He waited a few seconds, then repeated the experiment, with the same result. At last his patience was exhausted, and he was reluctantly forcing himself to admit the necessity of giving up his task for the night, when suddenly his attention was arrested by sounds so startling, that for the moment his perceptions were confused, and his feet seemed rooted to the spot where he stood. It was a strange, inexplicable noise, followed by what seemed like choking cries. Stooping hurriedly to put his ear to the key-hole, he saw beneath the chink of the door a vivid stream of light. That was a revelation which instantly flashed some idea of the truth to Hugh. Fire! Mark had fallen asleep, as he first surmised, and by some accident had set fire to books or papers. But what were those cries that sent such a thrill of terror to his heart? If his cousin was awake, why did he not make a struggle to unlock the door and call for help? In vain Hugh shook the handle of the door in his excitement, and called upon him: there was no reply. What was to be done? Again that cry, which now rose louder and seemed like a shriek wrung from the struggles of mortal agony. Not a moment was to be lost; until Mark's safety was secured there was no time to alarm the house. What was the value of property, in comparison with the preservation of life? Every second was precious—precious indeed!—if he could have seen the unhappy being at that moment, fighting for breath with the energy of desperation, and a strength that seemed born of madness, apparently cut off from all hope of rescue, with the horror of a terrible death strong upon him. Hugh's presence of mind supplied the answer to his own excited question. He must force an entrance into the room. He did not waste time in deliberation; quick as the thought itself came a suggestion of the means. It was the work of an instant to rush to the hall door, tear aside the heavy bolts and bars, and once outside, make a dash up the terrace steps, guided to the French window of the library by the vivid light that showed even through the closed curtains. Finding that the fastening

would not yield to his fierce wrench, he unhesitatingly thrust his foot through the great plate of glass, broke away the fragments, with stoical indifference to wounds upon his hands, and made one leap into the room.

To the latest hour of his life Hugh Crawton would never forget the pitiable spectacle then presented to his startled eyes, nor the horror which fixed it indelibly upon his memory. Mark's fear about the closing of the closet door was, happily, without foundation, but in his blind struggles the unfortunate man did not know it. He lay writhing on the floor singed, blackened fragments of his dress clinging about him, with hands working convulsively and eyes wildly fixed, their strained pupils dilated with the intensity of physical suffering. Contact with the carpeted floor had extinguished the flames, but a portion of the book-shelves behind him had caught fire. That was the light which Hugh had seen. Fortunately, it had not as yet spread too far for him to succeed in smothering it out by the energetic application of the heavy hearth-rug.

When there was nothing further to fear from the smoking charred mass, he pulled vigorously at the bell to rouse the servants and summon Dr. Grimes, whose medical services would be in immediate requisition, for he feared his cousin's injuries were very serious. Then he knelt down by the prostrate man, whose low, gasping moans wrung his heart with pity.

"Water—water," was the almost inarticulate murmur; "I—I am stifling; give me drink before I choke."

Hugh looked round, and was glad to see a water-bottle and glass on the table. He seized them, and gently raising Mark's head, held the precious draught to his lips, and pouring some drops into the hollow of his hand, laid them upon his forehead.

"Thanks—thanks; you have saved me. I was afraid that I was shut in there with the fire, and it would be my tomb; but the other door was locked; I did it myself. Who are you? and how did you get here?" The broken words came with difficulty, interrupted by gasps of pain.

The cousin answered, "I am Hugh Crawton, and I came in by a way which I made myself through the window."

A spasm convulsed the face of Mark for an instant. "Hugh Crawton," he muttered, faintly; "Hugh my deliverer! I can not see, but I know the voice. You, of all others, to come to me, knowing how I have wronged you, and that I am your enemy!"

Hugh replied, gently, "This is an occasion to banish all such reminiscences, and sink every other feeling but that of pity. I see in you now only a fellow-creature, suffering and in need."

"Do you mean that, Hugh Crawton? Ah! I knew you were always a good fellow; and as I often said, I should have liked you if you had been any body else. Water—give me more drink!"

Hugh did as he was desired, at the same time

trying to raise Mark; but the movement, gentle as it was, elicited a scream of pain.

"Don't—don't touch me, Hugh! I can not bear it; let me lie here; but tell me, what damage has the fire done?"

"Nothing that can not soon be replaced," said Hugh; "only a small portion of the shelves; it has not spread far."

"Is it over the door of the closet?"

"Yes."

Mark moaned. "Then it will get to *his* ears, and be put down to the long list which he has now against me; for he will know that I was trying to get at the will."

He might have betrayed more of his secrets to the ears of the wondering, agitated listener, but at that moment hurrying steps were heard in the passage, and Hugh had to hasten to unlock the door, giving admittance to Dr. Grimes, with a face full of alarm and anxiety, followed by Mrs. Crane, the butler, and one or two others of the hastily-roused servants, who came tremblingly in the train, their fears magnifying all the casualties that could possibly occur to a gentleman's house in the middle of the night. Dr. Grimes examined Mark's injuries, shook his head to Hugh, and emphatically pronounced it a serious case. Under his direction (with as much care and speed as it was possible to use under the circumstances) the unfortunate young man was moved to his own room. And thus, before the day dawned, there was another invalid, and one more chamber of suffering, in that stately house.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### HIS NURSE.

"THEN you have made up your mind, Nelly?"

"Yes, dear father."

"To leave me, and go to him?"

"It is my duty to watch beside my husband in this time of his need—the duty that every wife takes upon herself with her marriage-vows; and you know he has sent for me. We have heard how serious his case is, in the opinion of the doctors. Father, you would not have me disregard what may be the summons of a dying man; no, I feel that I must go."

"To stay how long, my dear?"

"As long as he needs me—to his last hour, if it be God's will to take him," she answered, with a solemn shade on her sweet face.

"But think how unworthy he is, Nelly; how badly he has acted to every one connected with him."

"But that does not absolve me from my vows, father, nor release me from my duty as a wife: it is still plain before me. For the rest, he has to answer not to man, but to his Maker. Oh, father, if we have such stern judgment for each other's trespasses, how may we expect to be dealt with in our turn, when it comes to the great day of reckoning for all?"

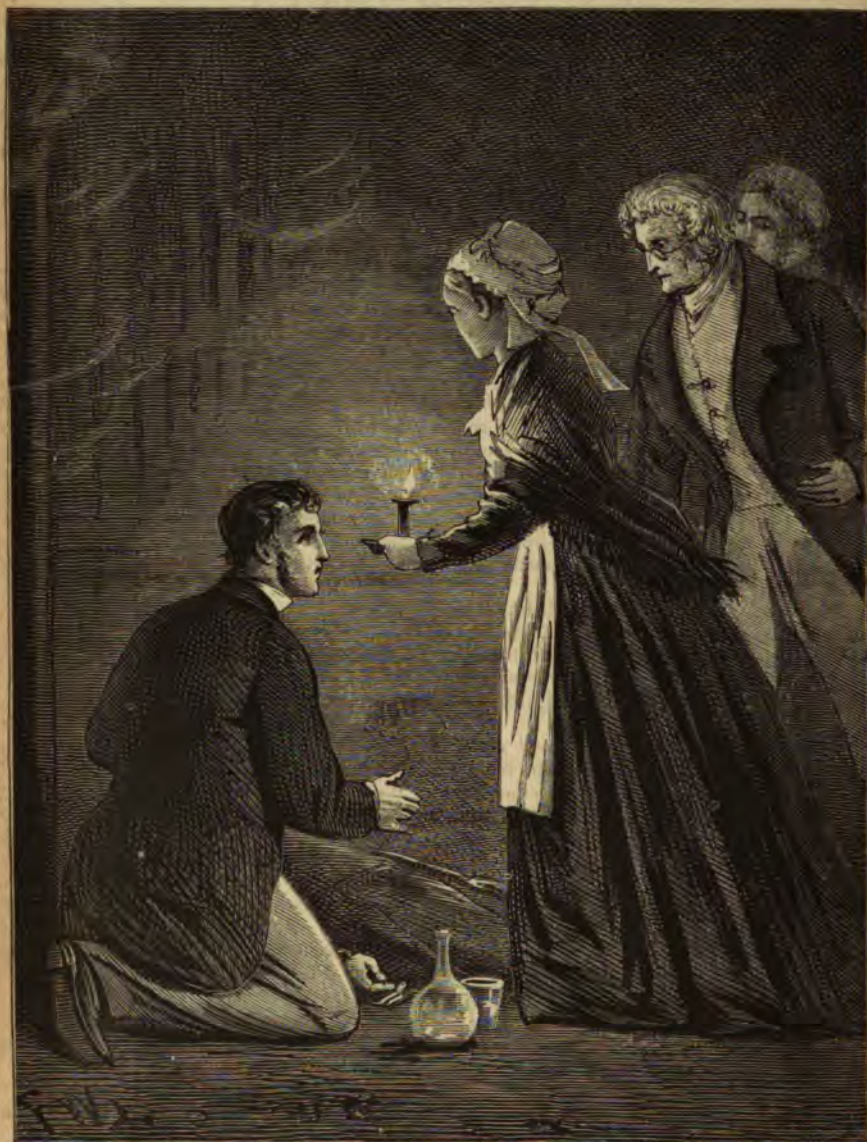


Giles Royton did not reply to this. It was what he called Eleanor's "high talk;" but he bowed his head in meek acquiescence to her opinions, as he usually did, saying, "Yes, my dear, it must be for the best, as you seem to see it so clearly. When do you go, Nelly?"

"To-day. I have made all necessary ar-

rangements which justified the gravest fears of the doctors, and the case was, as they had pronounced, very serious. His first request, given privately to Hugh Crawton, was that his wife Eleanor might be sent for at once.

Strange that he whom Mark had most wronged in the world, should be the one to whom he



A serious case.

rangements for my absence. Ann will manage for you very well while I am away. The next train leaves at four o'clock. I must try to be in time."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was true: Mark Danson had sustained in-

turned for advice and sympathy—the one to whom he gave his confidence, and depended upon before all the rest."

Daniel Crawton never knew the true history of the accident which was to have such a fatal ending. Hugh had guessed it from the chance

words which Mark dropped about the will ; but with characteristic generosity, he always spared him to his uncle on that point.

Mark lay on his bed of pain moaning at intervals, with his bandaged eyes turned towards the door, apparently listening to every passing sound. At last he heard whispering voices, and a footstep which he had not recognized before. Then he knew that Eleanor had come at his wish.

It was a strange, sad meeting. Eleanor pressed her hands upon her beating heart, and bent her head for a moment as if silently invoking a blessing on the purpose for which she had come, and for the poor maimed one, whose condition was sufficient to disarm in her woman's heart all resentful memory of the wrongs which he had done against her and others.

Then with a noiseless movement, her soft stuff dress making no rustle as she stirred, Eleanor passed round to his bedside and with her great wistful eyes looking tearfully at him, touched his hand with a low-spoken, "I am here, Mark."

That was all she said. No tone of reproach for the past unkindness and neglect, which she remembered not against him now. No casting-up to him of the shadow which he had thrown across her life, and the wounds of outraged love and broken trust which her heart would carry to the end. But it needed no accusing words from her to point the arrows which his own conscience was making for his torture as he lay. Enough that she was there—the wife whom he had slighted, ready to be his nurse and comforter in this his time of humiliation and sorest need—faithful and true to the end, the tender, loyal heart which he had so blindly thrust from him.

"Eleanor, my wife, I was afraid you would not come near me ; I deserve that you should not."

"It was my duty to be here, if you wished it, Mark."

"Ah, yes ; I might have known that would bring you, even if the old love were dead, as it must be now, after all that I have done to crush it. I deserve that it should be only duty that brings you to me now ; I deserve to mourn for the loss of that which I would not have. Oh, Nelly ! if I could but undo the past ! You said once, if I had only a true man's heart, and no hope but my own labor, how you could have worked and endured for my sake. I realize all, now that it is too late. You said also that my uncle's wealth had been my bane : that was true Nelly."

It was so long since he had used the familiar abbreviation of her name, which belonged to the early days of their love, when pet words were not so strange upon his lips. Eleanor's heart swelled, and some quiet tears fell on Mark's hand which still rested upon hers. He seemed much troubled.

"Tears, Nelly ; those should not be for me, who have made you shed so many. Poor girl ! your father said right : it was the darkest day of

your life when you met me." The low groan at that moment forced from him was not entirely caused by his physical sufferings, acute as they were ; he was enduring another kind of pain. He continued : "But, now—will you forget and forgive, Nelly?"

Her voice faltered as she answered the last gasping appeal. "I can not promise to forget, Mark, for it is beyond my power. I would, if I could, have back my first unshaken faith in you, and all the confidence of the old days ; but I can not, any more than I can put life and bloom into a dead flower : yet I forgive you from my heart."

"You do?"

"Yes, freely and fully."

"You are here to stay with me?" was his next anxious query.

"Yes, to stay and be your nurse ; it was for that I came."

Thus, with the solemn shadow of the grave falling between them, husband and wife were reunited at last.

## CHAPTER LX.

### THROUGH THE DARK VALLEY.

At last George Danson had paid his visit to Broombank. During his interview with Daniel Cawton he learned that his son was dying, and having expressed a desire to see him, they were once more brought together. None were present at that meeting except Eleanor, whom Mark did not like to be absent from his side for a moment. Hugh could only guess what passed between them, but he was glad to know that father and son were reconciled to each other. This was true. George Danson went from that sick-room full of softened thoughts about the dying, whom from that day he resolved to think of only as the fair-haired baby-boy that he left behind in England.

The day succeeding his visit found the sufferer so much worse, that the doctors limited the probable duration of the feeble span of life only to hours. It was visible to all that he was drawing very near to the "dark valley." Towards evening he roused a little. It was in that momentary flash of reviving strength that he petitioned to see his uncle, and Daniel Cawton, assisted by Hugh and Dr. Grimes, tottered feebly to his nephew's bedside, to give the forgiveness that he prayed for, and do what he could to lighten the last hours of the troubled spirit. It was then that he took leave of Mark, feeling that another sun would not rise for him.

At last the trying scene was over, and the dying man, by his own desire, was left alone with his devoted nurse. The bandage had been removed from one of his eyes, in which the sight had been preserved, just enough to give him what he craved—a parting glimpse of the face of that one tireless watcher, who ministered to him as only a loving woman could. He had learned to distinguish before all the rest that

velvet tread, and the cool, light hand that effected such marvels of softness and comfort with his pillows, and fluttered about him with the nameless tenderness of touch which it was impossible to mistake for that of a strange hand. Nothing left to him but this, from the wreck of all the ambitious dreams which had crumbled into ashes at his feet! Every thing else turned into "Dead Sea Fruit," and no hold left for him in the world that was fast receding from him—only this much-enduring woman's heart, which he had ever set aside and undervalued until now. It was a touching picture, that wife-nurse, as he saw her flitting about his room, or bending over his bed, with such a light of earnest pity in her eyes; her pale, pure face and sunny hair making such brightness in the dim room. Then he wondered, within himself, what had made him so blind to her beauty and goodness, and how he had ever come to be estranged from her.

"Too good for me, Nelly—always too good. Your heart ought to be stone towards me now, my poor patient girl, that I tried so sorely."

That was the burden of the piteous lament which often stole on Eleanor's ears, in the silence of those midnight watches, when her heart was sending up prayers for her husband that the burden might be lifted from his conscience, and his soul led to the mercy-seat. Who shall say that those petitions went up in vain before the "great white throne," where there is joy over "one sinner that repenteth?"

"Nelly, where are you?"

"Here, Mark; I have never left you."

She had been mixing some cordial, and stood by his pillow with the glass in her hand. There was an altered look on his face, and something in the sound of his voice startled her.

"Are you worse, Mark?"

"No; better, I think, for the pain is gone; but it seems to be getting dark and cold. What is the hour?"

"About ten."

"So late—or, I should say, so early! Nelly, come nearer—lay your hand here on my head; I—I want to say something."

She had difficulty in catching distinctly the low, broken words.

"My wife, you say that you forgive?"

"Yes, dear Mark."

"And Hugh Cawton has forgiven, he told me so, and the old man also; if it could all come over again, I—I think it would be different. Nelly, it cuts me keener than if you had all cast me out from among you. Tell your father that I have spoken, and he will be taken back—the office when I—I—"

Here the words sunk into inarticulate murmurs. Eleanor had become alarmed, and rang the bell. She did not know how near was even then the wing of the death-angel, and that the shadow which had fallen on his face was that of the coming change. Before the bell was answered he had fallen into a stupor of partial insensibility, from which he did not arouse until

near midnight. Dr. Grimes and Mr. Poynts were both in attendance at his bedside. Now and then his hand moved over the coverlet, as if in search of something, until Eleanor, mutely interpreting the sign, let her fingers steal into his clasp.

Those nearest to him heard at last a murmur: "Nelly—wife—ask God to forgive all!"

Those were nearly his last words. So the tide of life ebbed out for him. He died before daybreak, with the hand of the woman who had loved him so faithfully still held in his clinging clasp, and her tearful face bowed down beside him. And thus the wife kept true to her own high sense of duty; and the light of her long-slighted love, steadfast to the end, abided with him, even "through the dark valley."

## CHAPTER LXI.

### RECONCILED.

It was weeks after the death of Mark Danson, and life at Broombank was flowing on in the old tranquil current; the agitated eddies which had troubled the stream were smoothed away, leaving it apparently calm as before. The young widow had returned to her father's house, having received much kindly notice from Daniel Cawton, who would always honor her for her devotion to her dying husband. As Mark had promised Eleanor, Giles Royton was restored to his old place in the office without comment of any kind; and as he prudently kept his own counsel on the subject, according to that secretive habit for which his fellow-clerks condemned him, they never succeeded in getting at the real cause of his absence and return.

The old merchant's recovery was still steadily progressing. It was not long before he was able to extend his carriage airings about the village to drives into the city, and periodical visits to his beloved counting-house, in which he found such strange attraction; clinging to it with a sort of affection, as the battle-ground of his world-struggles and the scene of his labors and successes.

After that there came a proud day for Hugh Cawton, when he re-entered the counting-house which he had left under such different auspices—re-entered it with his name cleared, and his character thoroughly vindicated from the faintest breath of suspicion—a proud day when he stood among those who had been his fellow-workers, holding up his noble head, and winning good opinions from all by his frank, kindly bearing. There was not one among them who was not glad when it became known that he was coming back, not as cashier, but to take Mark Danson's place as junior partner.

Thus was the sky clearing in the dawn of brighter days for that poor branch of the Cawton family, who had so long struggled on and taken their by-path in the shadow. The high-souled Christian mother accepted it as an answer



to her prayers, rejoicing more over the vindication of her son's innocence, than the worldly prosperity which it promised to bring with it. And Margaret hailed the good news about her brother with flushed cheeks and brightening eyes; for the passing away of that dark cloud would remove the barrier which her own resolution had placed between herself and happiness as the wife of Charles Rivers.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a morning of unusual excitement for Chriss—excitement curiously blended with pleasure and vexation: pleasure, because she liked to see the Broombank carriage at her master's door, and derived a degree of satisfaction from the idea that the dwellers in that unpretending little street would be lost in envious contemplation of the carriage, coachman, and sleek, prancing horses, with their glittering harness, in the whole of which imposing spectacle the old servant enjoyed a certain sort of proprietorship; but her vexation extended over a wider area, and embraced a variety of irritating causes. It was one of her standard grievances that her beloved mistress should have chosen the wrong brother when it was well known that she might have had her choice between them. So on account of the poverty of the house to which she had attached herself, Chriss always resented any assertion of the wealth of Daniel Crawton, whom she could never forgive for the superiority and worldly pre-eminence over his brother, though personally she did not hold her master in very high respect; it was simply a reflection of that with which she invested her mistress.

The morning in question was to be memorable to the Crawtons. It was not merely the stopping of the Broombank carriage at the door which had startled the old servant out of her usual groove, thrown her master into a state of nervous excitement, and called up a warmer color to Margaret's fair cheek. They were used to the sight of the carriage, for when Hugh paid his home visits his uncle always insisted upon his using that mode of conveyance. But that morning he did not come alone; Daniel Crawton had surprised his nephew by unexpectedly announcing his intention to accompany him.

"I am going to see your father, Hugh—to make peace if he will have it. We two, the last of our family line, should not go down to the grave at enmity with each other. You said that our estrangement had been a grief to your mother, my boy: I should have known that years ago."

Thus it was that Daniel Crawton crossed Robert's threshold for the first time since his marriage, and the brothers met after their separation of half a lifetime.

Before the old merchant reached the sofa, his quick, intelligent glance had taken in every thing around him: shabby furniture, threadbare carpet, and the pervading air of painfully careful preservation, which made his heart ache with a sudden pang—for those simple details told him the story of their poverty more forcibly than it

could have been put into words. If he had wanted a confirmation, he would have had it in the faces of the wedded pair, on whom his gaze rested with such lingering wistfulness: the husband worn with ill health and habitual fretfulness, and the gentle matron, with her sweet faded face telling so plainly of the shadow under which she had lived since her marriage; the woman whom his proud heart had almost worshipped in its time of youth and passion—the woman whom he would have cherished and shielded, even at the cost of his own life. That old regret, why did it come to trouble him now?

"Brother, sister, am I welcome?" he said, extending his hand towards them—"welcome to your house from which I have been too long a stranger."

"Yes; too long a stranger," repeated the sweet woman's voice, which he had heard so seldom since the days when it made the music of life for him. "I have hoped and prayed for this reunion between you two, Daniel Crawton; it seemed such an unnatural feud for brothers to keep up through their lives."

"You are right, Mary," he said, turning to her with strange humility; "and I, the oldest and strongest, have been most to blame; perhaps I expected too much from human nature. No matter; we have not to do with the past now, but only with the few brighter days that may still be left to us."

"My brother Dan—"

But the speaker went on, without seeming to hear those murmured words, "Robert, as boys we had not many quarrels on our own account, but what we had I remember we used to make up quickly. As men, we have been wanting in that wisdom. There was fault on both sides; on mine the most, for I ought to have led the way for you. It was pride that came from the old family stock, and which we turned to a bad use."

Robert Crawton had no strong feelings wherewith to feed even his resentments. Completely subdued by those words and by the manner in which they were said, his spirit went down at once before his brother.

"Let us fancy we are boys again, and make it up, Dan. Whenever I have any dreams about you, you are always a boy thrashing the other fellows for me, just as you used."

A faint ray of light rippled over the merchant's face at this remembrance, while Robert let his delicate hand close over that which was now a second time extended to him; and prompted by a happy thought, he took that of his wife, and laid it on their re-united hands, saying, "You are very like our old father, Dan; and I am glad you came; it seems like bringing back our best days."

"We have now a new link between us," said the elder brother, pointing to Hugh—"your son Robert, and the noblest Crawton of them all—one who will do more honor to the old name than either you or I."

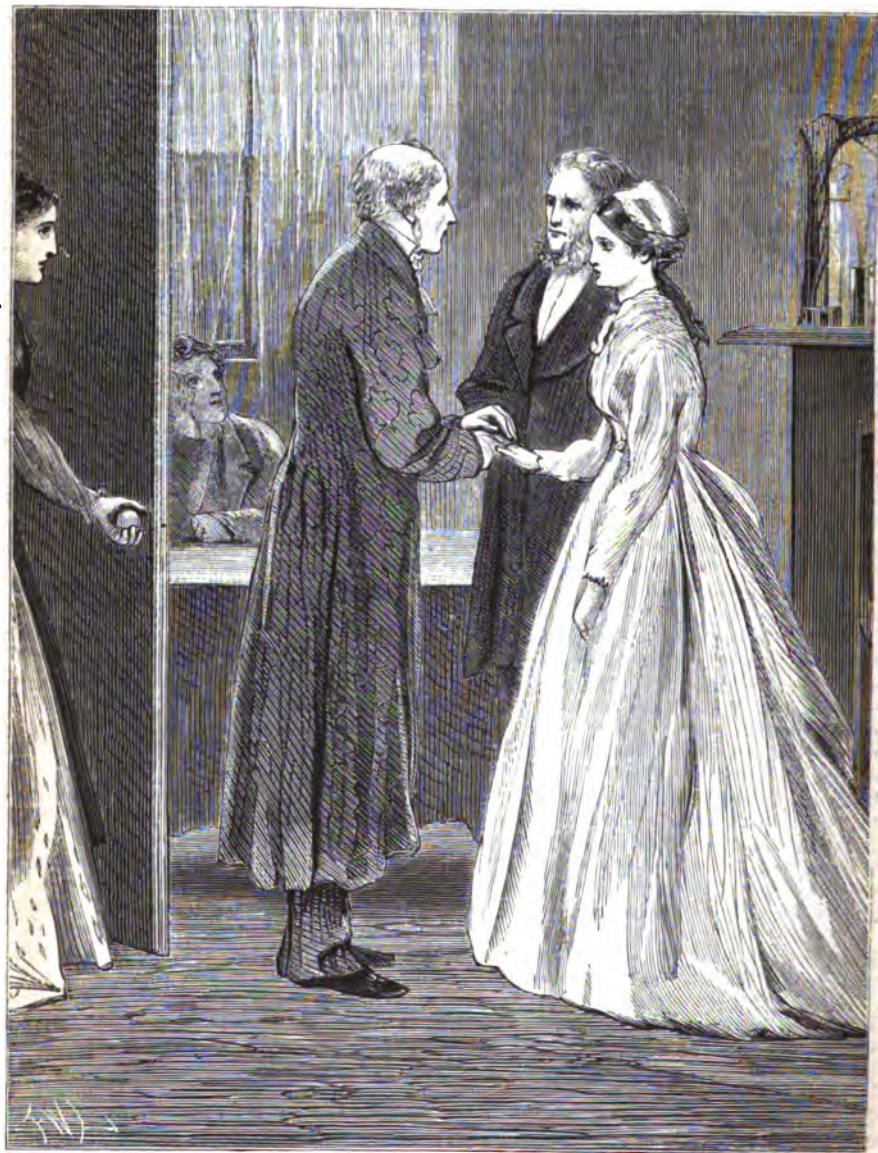
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Truly it was a morning of intense excitement to Chriss, who hovered about the kitchen stairs and the passages in a state of helpless mystification as to what might be going on in the back parlor—now and then indulging in spasmodic rushes to the street door to stare at the carriage and the figure of Thompson lolling lazily on his

## CHAPTER LXII.

## SUNSHINE AND MARRIAGE BELLS.

"MARGARET, my darling, tell me how many more weeks I must count before the end of my probation—when will you set me free to claim my reward?"



"It seems like bringing back our best days."

box, occasionally catching himself up on the verge of a doze to glance curiously towards the house, wonder a little at his master's prolonged stay, or to make a wild crusade against the summer flies, who were keeping up a tormenting dance about the most sensitive part of his face.

The fair face crimsoned under his gaze, and self-conscious Margaret contrived to disguise a little confused flutter in the demure question, "What reward, Charles?"

"The reward of my waiting and of my patience."

"I am afraid that is a rare virtue; for you are very impatient as a rule, sir."

He laughed saucily. "I beg leave to reserve that point for future discussion, fair lady; at present, I am not to be diverted from my point."

She smiled, and shook her head.

He spoke again, his voice taking a more earnest tone. "The cloud has passed, Margaret; there is nothing now to delay our happiness."

He knew himself to be master of the position, and Margaret acknowledged it to herself. Even her ingenious brain could not produce a fitting contradiction of his unanswerable assertion; and as her own sympathies were all on the side of the pleader, she had no alternative but to allow herself to listen to his persuasions, and finally won to give the answers he sought.

So it came to pass that on a certain evening Mrs. Crawton received a communication from her daughter made with many shy smiles and blushes, by which it appeared that importunate Charles had been allowed to have his own way and propose the day for their marriage. It was a very quiet wedding, when it came, May acting as bridesmaid for her friend. Daniel Crawton bestowed a liberal marriage portion upon his niece, and every thing seemed to promise well for the happiness of the young pair.

This wedding of his sister proved rather a trying occasion for Hugh Crawton. He officiated in his place in a sort of maze of happy bewilderment, which the presence of May Rivers, in her floating, cloud-like dress, helped to complete. There was altogether something so suggestive in the situation that it was nearly fatal to certain stoical resolutions which he had lately formed concerning himself and May. They were now intimate friends, continually thrown into each other's society with the most favorable conjunction of circumstances and opportunities; every thing to encourage their provoking tantalizing friendship, which left all so indefinite, and beyond which they never advanced. May acted and talked as though she had not the faintest suspicion that he liked her any more than the rest of the young ladies whom he met; and, on his part, Hugh could never summon courage to whisper one word of the declaration which had been so often trembling on his lips.

But this state of uncertainty and mental disquietude could not go on. There came a day when he determined to put his question to May.

It was in the winter season when Mr. and Mrs. Rivers had settled in their charming Hampstead villa, "quite like mature married people," May said. It was in the cosy warmth of Aunt Lydia's fire-lit parlor, where May was diligently working at some marvellous creation in many-colored silks and beads. Then Hugh spoke up in his strong, manly way, pouring out with impetuous earnestness all the feelings so long repressed. May Rivers, stealing demure glances at him, was almost startled by the passion which she had roused in that deep nature.

"You must have guessed the truth, Miss Rivers—May: I will call you by that name now,

though you may deny me the right to use it ever again."

"You are very abrupt, Mr. Hugh."

"Do I displease you?"

"Perhaps you do," pouted the willful beauty, making little indented creases in her white forehead, and softly beating her tiny foot on the hearth-rug with something of defiance.

Hugh's cheek paled a little as he said, "Give me your answer before I leave you, May. I must have a goal to look forward to, or lose sight of it forever. Tell me if you can ever care for me enough to give me the hope of winning you."

But she was still coy and provokingly wayward.

"Perhaps I do care just a little, and perhaps not at all."

His sensitive soul shrank under her light words.

"Don't trifle with me, May, in this the most serious interest of my life."

"I shall do as I please, Mr. Hugh Crawton."

This was on her lips, but she did not say it, for he added passionately, "Your next words must either bind me to you, May, or send me from you without hope; I can not go on like this—can not be content with only friendship from you."

She caught the quivering undertone of pain in his voice, and met the look in his eyes. Then her face changed; the white lids lowered over the crimson cheeks; and almost against her will, like some sweet, wild, timorous bird, that vainly tries to resist its capturer, the shy, shrinking maiden love fluttered out to him, and dumbly confessed his victory.

Before they parted that night they were plighted lovers, and ere many weeks were over the dignified spinster, Aunt Lydia, was amazed and confounded by being made a partner in a love secret, and effectually roused to the conviction that her darling had really attained to the estate of womanhood.

In the early autumn of the following year, the time for mellow ripeness in fruit and flower, when the harvest corn was reaped, and the sunshine was still warm and bright upon the land, Hugh and May were married, to the great gratification of Daniel Crawton, who rejoiced over the advent of his little saucy favorite as mistress of Broombank, which he had transferred to his nephew.

And now, having thus far followed the fortunes of our friends, we would gladly linger a while longer with them in these their brighter days. But as this can not be, we must content ourselves with a friendly farewell to each before we part company. The old merchant kept his word with respect to providing for the worldly comfort of Mark Danson's widow, to whom he presented a life-annuity, adding to it the portion which had been set aside for Mark in the altered will. Thus, with the fear of poverty removed from her, Eleanor went back to her old tranquil life with the father whose good influence she

had always been, only emerging occasionally into the outward world to pay visits to her friends, Margaret and May. Thus, true daughter, as she had been true wife, Eleanor walked on her shaded way in sweet resigned calm, envying not the brighter light that fell on other paths.

Charles Rivers kept his promise to George Danson, to whom he still considered himself under obligation, by procuring him a situation where the income, though comparatively small, would be sufficient to maintain him, and give him a chance of retrieving some of his old errors. The same generous hand discharged the debt to Mrs. Dale with a liberality which helped to lighten her heart of many burdening cares. Fred Dalton left London, having accepted a situation procured for him by a relative in the north of England, and thus passes out of sight and knowledge, journeying on to the new life.

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At last one of Hugh Crawton's dearest wishes was realized—his mother could rest. No further need for her to toil and deny herself. Through the liberality of the wealthy brother, the comforts of life were secured him, and the invalid could have his wants supplied without the necessity of so many sacrifices from his wife. He seemed improving in health and spirits. There was found to be no active disease of the lungs; and with care it was predicted that he might live some years. Change and excitement had done him good, while the advent of new interests had taken him more out of his narrow groove, and the mind had ceased to prey upon itself. At the earnest solicitation of Daniel Crawton they removed to a pretty cottage near Broombank, where old Chriss was superannuated in favor of a younger servant, and much against her own will enforced to rest like her mistress. Before taking leave of this eccentric old woman,

we must not forget to mention that on the eve of her young master's marriage she received a mysterious parcel, addressed to herself, containing her investment of capital returned to her from Hugh with compound interest, and the addition of a new shawl of her favorite pattern and color. It may be added that Chriss showed her appreciation of the gift by wearing it when she went to witness the wedding.

Daniel Crawton had not a repetition of his first attack, as Dr. Grimes sometimes feared he would; but he was never the same man after that shock to his strength. This was proved by his almost entire withdrawal from active business life, and the surrender of every thing to his nephew. He was content now to stay at home to be nursed by good Mrs. Crane, or amused by little racy word-skirmishes with Mrs. Hugh Crawton, such as had always delighted him in the days of his guardianship.

And what of Hugh Crawton in these advancing years—"the noblest Crawton of them all?" So his uncle had spoken of him, and not without truth, as he afterwards proved to those who knew him best. In his business relations there were none more honored than he. It was known that his word was an unimpeachable thing, always safe to trust in. The rough discipline of his past life had not been without beneficial results; it had cut and polished the ore, and helped to give out its true ring. It was said that he had all his uncle's high qualities without his iron hardness of character, for there could not be a more sympathetic friend and helper to those in need. It was the remembrance of that painful passage in his own experience, which made him so solicitous for the welfare of any struggling one, whom he knew to be drifting about with the tide of adverse circumstances, as he had once been, and perhaps like him undeservedly beaten "Under Foot."

THE END.

